Trauma in Selected Eastern African Fiction and Life Writing on Civil Wars, 2000 - 2014

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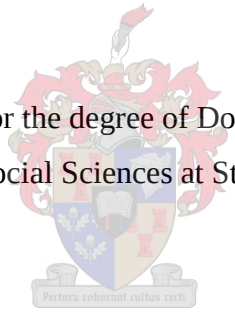

Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University

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March 2017

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March 2017 Signature ……..

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my son, Vitumbiko Raphael Tembo, who missed parental love, guidance and care in the three years I was away from him. I also dedicate this project to the memory of my loving parents for nurturing me and for always watching over me.

Abstract

This study draws attention to and explores the portrayal of civil war in East African fictional and autobiographical works. Specifically, it examines the various and distinct ways in which East African writers use literature and art to translate and transmit the physical, vicarious and psychological trauma resulting from intra-state conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. My aim in embarking on this project is to demonstrate, qua Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, that trauma studies can provide useful methodological tools for the analysis of the representation of trauma in fictional and autobiographical works, bringing to the fore specific narrative techniques in order to represent both individual and collective trauma. Works of a diverse selection of East African authors are selected for this study. These texts indicate that art can provide an enabling forum for retrieving, relieving and re-evaluating violent contexts and their (dis)continuities in East Africa. I build my reading around theoretical aspects on postcolonial criticism and trauma studies. From postcolonial criticism I particularly draw on Homi Bhabha's views to situate the terms hybridity, place/displacement, DissemiNation, enunciation, identity formation, ambivalence, nationalism, alterity and otherness in my study. The main point here is to explore the ways in which the uncanny nature of violence in the selected East African (con)texts reflects the aforementioned terms, which I read as postcolonial realities. In the main, however, I examine the selected works as embodying classic narrative devices of trauma fiction in their mediation of civil war discourse and how it leads to trauma. Thus I draw from trauma scholars working in various disciplines, such Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Judith Herman, in order to explore how notions of "the uncanny," "the unhomely" and "latency" are reflected in traumatised individuals, groups and communities in postcolonial East African contexts. The study finds that in many ways, literature and art may be positioned in a discursive space between instruction and enlisting larger publics in the project of redressing harm. To this end, the study proposes that literature and art are good fora for campaign against human rights violations; that such a clarion call as inscribed in the selected texts reflects María Pía Lara's notion of the illocutionary power of literature.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie vestig die aandag op en verken die uitbeelding van die burgeroorlog in fiksie en outobiografiese werke uit Oos-Afrika. Dit ondersoek spesifiek die verskillende en onderskeie maniere waarop skrywers uit Oos-Afrika letterkunde en kuns gebruik om die fisieke, middellike en sielkundige trauma wat voortspruit uit interstaatkonflikte in Ethiopië, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalië, Suid-Soedan, Soedan en Uganda weer te gee en oor te dra. My doel met die aanpak van hierdie projek is om, qua Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, te demonstreer dat traumastudies nuttige metodologiese instrumente vir die ontleding van die uitbeelding van trauma in fiksie en outobiografiese werke kan verskaf, wat spesifieke narratiewe tegnieke na vore bring ten einde sowel individuele as kollektiewe trauma uit te beeld. Die werke van ’n uiteenlopende keur skrywers uit Oos-Afrika is vir hierdie studie gekies. Hierdie tekste dui aan dat kuns ’n bemagtigende forum kan verskaf vir die ontsluiting, verligting en herevaluering van gewelddadige kontekste en hul (dis)kontinuïteite in Oos-Afrika. Ek het my lesing om teoretiese aspekte rakende postkoloniale kritiek en traumastudies gebou. Uit postkoloniale kritiek maak ek spesifiek gebruik van Homi Bhabha se sienings om die terme hibriditeit, plek/verplasing, “DissemiNation,” uiteensetting, identiteitsvorming, ambivalensie, nasionalisme, alteriteit en andersheid in my studie te situeer. Die hoofpunt hier is om maniere te verken waarop die onheilspellende aard van geweld in die gekose (kon)tekste uit Oos-Afrika die voormelde terme weergee, wat ek as postkoloniale realiteite beskou. Hoofsaaklik bestudeer ek egter die geselekteerde werke as die beliggaming van klassieke narratiewe tegnieke van traumafiksie in hul bemiddeling van burgeroorlogdiskoers en hoe dit tot trauma lei. Ek steun dus op trauma-kenners wat in verskeie dissiplines werksaam is, soos Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman en Judith Herman, ten einde te verken hoe opvattings oor “die onheilspellende”, “die onhuislike” en “latentheid” in getraumatiseerde individue, groepe en gemeenskappe in postkoloniale kontekste uit Oos-Afrika weergegee word. Die studie bevind dat letterkunde en kuns op vele maniere geposisioneer kan word in ’n diskursiewe ruimte tussen lering en die insluiting van groter publieke by die projek om onregte reg te stel. Hiervolgens doen hierdie studie aan die hand dat letterkunde en kuns goeie forums is om veldtogte teen menseregteskendings te voer en dat die wekroep wat die gekose tekste ingebed is María Pía Lara se idee van die “illocutionary power,” of kragtige uitbeeldingsvermoë, van letterkunde weerspieël.

Acknowledgements

Someone said that writing a PhD thesis makes one behave like Unoka in Achebe's famed novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Like Unoka, I owe many people over a thousand cowries' worth of debt. And like this sanguine character in Achebe's *magnum opus* I can only say I will repay all of them, but not today. I have had the good fortune to be supervised by the best scholar, in my opinion, in Prof Grace A. Musila, together with Dr Emmanuel Ngwira. I owe them a wealth of gratitude and thanks for their enduring patience, painstaking mentorship, dedication to duty and the invaluable comments they made on the numerous drafts I sent them, most of which were hastily written. There were times when I avoided running into Prof Musila. This is not because we had become enemies but because I thought she deserved a better supervisee. If now I talk of producing a coherent work, it is because she gave me all the support and mentorship I needed to get this project out of my way. She was always there, going out of her way to remind me of what I could achieve. Most important of all, Prof Musila challenged and believed in me in a way no other teacher ever had in my life. My profound thanks and gratitude also go to Dr Wamuwi Mbao for his valuable feedback on my thesis during its formative stages. I would also like to thank Dr Kylie Thomas (a friend of all seasons), Dr Tilla Slabbert, Prof Sally-Ann Murray, Prof Annie Gagiano, Dr Nwabisa Bangeni, Prof Tina Steiner, Prof Louise Green, Prof Shaun Viljoen, Dr Megan Jones, Dr Riaan Oppelt, Dr Dawid de Villiers and Dr Daniel Roux. These are friendly, selfless and academically engaging senior colleagues, who always renewed my academic hopes. Across the African continent, I am humbled by Dr Charlotte Baker's and David Whitehouse's selfless hearts. They gladly shipped their work to me when I wrote them that I could not access their books. Last, but not least, the entire English Department at Stellenbosch University deserves special mention for its moral and financial support during my endless quest for knowledge and networking with international scholars through conference attendances and presentations. Finally, yet importantly, I thank the University of Malawi for granting me a study leave so that I can pursue my studies at Stellenbosch University.

I am highly thankful to both the Graduate School in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA) programme for awarding me a scholarship so that I can complete this project and, more crucially, for providing an enabling environment for me to study. Dr Cindy Lee Steenekamp and Ms Yolanda Johnson will remain the unsung heroes that made sure that I worried less and less about how I was going to survive in Stellenbosch. They were more of friends to me than managers of the entire Graduate School, because of the way they made it easy for me to always trust and want to speak with them wherever and whenever we met. Like Prof Musila, Dr Steenekamp became a friend I always run to whenever the going got tough, and she always made sure that I got out of her office with a feeling that nothing is impossible.

There will always be good friends in one's life. For me, Marciana Nafula Were, Kondwani Khonje and Mr Martin Nyirenda lived up to their calling as good friends. My research would have taken a different course if Nafula had not been present at the brainstorming sessions the

two of us had often, usually during our lunch breaks. She always smiled and pushed me on with her incisive observations on my raw ideas, and on the so many issues we shared outside our academic work. Without her, perhaps I would not have perfected my arguments the way I finally did. Kondwani's friendship is the best one could ask for in one's lifetime. He always kept an eye on my home whilst I was away. Most important of all, I thank him for his generosity and support which ensured stability for my son. Mr Martin Nyirenda is probably one of the humblest friends I have had the privilege to meet in my life, always leading by personal example. He, too, was unfailing in his moral, spiritual and material support and guidance. Dr Syned Mthatiwa, Dr Damazio Mfune, Asante Mtenje, Mzati Nkolokosa, Marion Chirwa, Janet Chikoja, Catherine Makhumula, Mymoena Londt and Tania Adams have always been the faithful friends one needs around, to keep going. They never failed me in my academic endeavours, and in always listening to my endless talk about studies. Last but not least, I am immensely grateful to the following cohortees and friends – particularly Doseline Kiguru, Serah Kasembeli, David Yenjela, Sylvia Nahayo, Davis Nyanda, Helen Venganai, Jacqueline Bullindah and Neema Laiser – for the kind of friendship we shared over the course of our stay in Stellenbosch and for their friendliness, kindness, practical assistance and wisdom when the going got tough for me. From them I take away so many special memories as well as a lifetime of experiences that will live with me for the rest of my life.

Mr. Thys Hauptfleisch will remain the good landlord in my life. His humility and ability to accommodate my reflective – and, at times conflicted – self could only be explained in terms of a man who knows that repaying wrong for wrong never brought anyone any good. He literally adopted me at 5 Faure Street and put up with all the annoying stuff I and my fellow housemates sometimes got up to. He also made sure that he always looked out for me.

Earlier or abridged versions of some of the chapters in this thesis have appeared, or are forthcoming, in a number of publications. Sections of Chapter Two appeared in *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies* 32.2 and in *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society* 48.2 as "Paranoia, 'Chosen Trauma' and Forgiveness in Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise*" and "Writing 'Parrhesia,' Narrating 'the Other Rwandan Genocide': Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* and Pierre-Claver Ndacyayisenga's *Dying to Live*," respectively. A section of Chapter Three appeared in *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* as "Unhomelines, Unending Phobias and Liminality in Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire*." I would like to thank the editors of the three journals and the anonymous peer reviewers for a job well done and for publishing the articles. Another section of Chapter Two is forthcoming in *a/b: Autobiographical Studies* as "*Testimonio* as a Trauma Narrative: Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*." Another section of Chapter Three is forthcoming in *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* as "Katabasis, Adult Betrayals, and Liminal Identities in China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier*." Finally, a section of Chapter Five is forthcoming in *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* as "Reduced to Rubbish: Trauma and Migrant Identities in Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother*." I sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers who gave me valuable feedback on the three forthcoming articles.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Trauma in Selected East African Fiction and Life Writing on Civil Wars

1.1. Contextualising the Study

Since the mid-twentieth century, most countries in Eastern Africa have experienced a spate of armed conflicts often leading to civil or inter-state wars. This study offers a critical analysis of the narrative representations of civil war traumas in Eastern African fiction and life writing.[1] It discusses a range of twenty-first century contemporary trauma narratives published between 2000 and 2014 by Eastern African-born writers who write from the diaspora to evoke the violent conflicts that caused them, their neighbours and compatriots great suffering. I focus on Eastern Africa because, in my opinion, it stands out as a region that has experienced several protracted, chronic and complex intra-state conflicts in recent times. I am aware of the contending view that "intra-state conflicts very easily spill across international boundaries triggering conflict between states, resulting in inter-state conflicts" (Bereketeab 4). Nevertheless, I only refer to inter-state conflicts where they help illuminate the issues I interrogate in this study. Otherwise I strictly focus on literary constructions and (re)imaginations of intra-state conflicts that have happened in individual Eastern African countries. More concretely, my analysis focuses on how fictional and autobiographical works from Eastern Africa mediate (that is to say, represent, interpret, comment upon and intervene in) traumatic human experiences in the first fourteen years of the twenty-first century.

There is no clearly agreed-upon understanding of what countries constitute the Eastern African region, in part because of the geographical position of some of the countries I focus on. Nevertheless, I use the term Eastern Africa in this study to refer to the vast region extending from Sudan in the north to Tanzania in the south. The study understands the region as comprising of Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar,

[1] In *Essays on Life-Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (1992), Marlene Kadar provides a useful definition of life writing as "a genre of documents or fragments of documents written out of life, or unabashedly out of personal experience of the writer" (152). Riffing her ideas through Shari Benstock, the person credited with coining the term, Kadar argues that life writing comprises texts that are "both fictional and non-fictional" and are linked by "a thematic concern with a life, or the self" (152). I am aware that different terms are used to refer to life writing, just as there are distinctions between life writing and testimonial life writing (a term that is limited to auto/biography, memoir/s and testimonios). Among the alternative terms for life writing, there is what Ana Douglass calls "texts of witness." Robert Scholes et al. propose "empirical narratives" as a fitting term, while Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call them "witness narratives." I use these alternative terms interchangeably in this study, to refer to life writing in general and autobiographies and memoirs, in particular.

Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.[2] Out of these fifteen countries, I focus on literary representations of fratricidal conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. I argue that the selected countries represent the postcolonial African state that, in Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman's formulation, has suffered from "the chain of upheavals and tribulations, instabilities, fluctuations and ruptures of all sorts (wars, genocide, large-scale movements of populations, sudden devaluation of currencies, natural catastrophes, brutal collapses of prices, breaches in provisioning, diverse forms of exaction, coercion and constraint) … over the last several years" (324; parentheses in original). Mbembe and Roitman's project is to examine "the series of operations in and through which people weave their existence in incoherence, uncertainty, instability and discontinuity" in the postcolony (325). Nevertheless, I find their views about the African postcolony's unending crises informative and I affirm and deliberately re-contextualise them here as a point of departure in my examination of literary representations of war and violence in the selected Eastern African (con)texts.

Twelve literary texts that retrieve and evaluate oppressive practices and relations in post-independence Eastern Africa have been selected for this study. They are: Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names* (2014) and Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010) from Ethiopia; Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire* (2006) from Eritrea; Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (2011) and Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (2014) from Somalia; Emmanuel Jal's *War Child* (2009) from South Sudan, Halima Bashir's *Tears of the Desert* (2009) from Sudan; China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier* (2002) and Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting* (2007) from Uganda; and Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* (2004), Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears* (2007) and Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise* (2010) from Rwanda. As I argue following this introduction, the nature of the conflicts in the individual countries of the region shapes the literary and stylistic choices that the authors make. For example, some of the authors focus on the ethnic/racial tensions that haunt them and their compatriots. Authors from Rwanda, Sudan and South Sudan fit into this category. In my view, authors from the horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia) mainly concern themselves with journeys of displaced bodies across land and water masses. Finally,

[2] This, too, has its own downside, with Tom Odhiambo and Godwin Siundu observing in their editorial to the inaugural issue of *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* journal that countries such as "Eritrea, Djibouti; or even the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Comoros or Seychelles" fall outside "the common understanding of [what is called] eastern Africa" ("Journeying" 1). In this study, then, "Eastern Africa" is not a settled term.

I propose that authors from Uganda zoom in on the sense of entrapment that haunts the domestic scene. Notwithstanding these individual choices, all the selected texts are driven by trauma and intra-state conflict and their effects on individuals, groups or whole societies. Each of the selected texts either depicts a collective trauma, which is explored from a personal point of view, or focuses solely on a personal experience of trauma. Examples of such texts include *Tears of the Desert*, *Smile through the Tears*, *Little Mother*, *Surviving the Slaughter*, *Child Soldier*, *War Child*, *Heart of Fire* and *A Long Way from Paradise*. A few others are overtly political in their depiction of the authors and their protagonists' experience of a public trauma as a means of raising awareness about the consequences of specific historical events. *All Our Names*, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and *Waiting* fall into this category. Despite the selection, these texts are not a comprehensive list of Eastern African fictional and autobiographical works that remember, interrogate, subvert and re-interpret intra-state conflicts in the region; but they nevertheless offer an insightful range of reflections on the trauma of civil war experienced by survivors, perpetrators, children, child soldiers, rape victims, immigrants and refugees, among others.

An important point has to be made from the outset. This is that the authors discussed in this study wrote their texts from their experiences of the diaspora or with an intra-continental diasporic sensibility. In my view, the authors do this for two reasons. First, they seek institutional acceptance that they still belong to Eastern Africa despite the potentially overwhelming experiences that drove them (and some of their compatriots) out of the region. Most important of all, they do this because their experiences of the violent upheavals require that they occupy a space that offers them a semblance of safety from the type of war that, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o aptly observes, exists between the state and its artists. This freedom from the claws of the state allows some of them to foreground a critical stand that, as we shall see, borders on activism in their work. Thus, while literature and art allow them multiple points of entry and exit into the social upheavals that dog their respective societies, it also affords them space to speak against human rights violations. I discuss how some of these texts engage in activism in some sections and chapters that follow.

I am aware of Eastern Africa's multilingual publishing contexts, and of the fact that some of the selected texts were not originally published in English. For example, Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears* and Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* are translations from French by Lesley McCubbin and Julia Emerson, respectively.

Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother* is a translation from Italian by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto. Finally, Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire* is translated from German by Christine Lo.[3] I am also aware of Jacques Derrida's observation that things always get lost in the process of translation. In "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?" Derrida opines that "wherever the unity of the word is threatened or put into question, it is not only the operation of translation that finds itself compromised; it is also the concept, the definition, and the very axiomatics, the idea of translation that must be reconsidered" (181). Elsewhere he maintains that is it impossible to render a 'pure' translation of a text. As he observes,

> what happens at the moment one tries to translate these words. Even if by some miracle one could translate all of the virtual impulses at work in this utterance, one thing remains that could never be translated: the fact that there are two tongues here, or at least more than one. By translating everything into [another language], at best one would translate all of the virtual or actual content, but one could not translate the event which consists in grafting several tongues onto a single body. (*The Ear* 99)

Derrida's remarks are helpful for an understanding of the impossibility of representing the other in language, and the enduring problems in translating a text. My aim is not to invalidate Derrida's views about language and translation here, or the translated texts I examine in this study. Rather, my interest is in reading and analysing what can be discerned in the translated texts' depictions and re-interpretations of war and violence and the trauma they bring to bear on individuals, groups and communities in Eastern Africa.

The overall goal of this study is to explore the ways in which a range of traumatic experiences, which I find to be the effects of the different civil war contexts in the selected Eastern African countries, are differently evoked in the chosen texts. I am particularly interested in the contemporary circuits of the trauma story, most of which have appeared in fictional and autobiographical works from individual countries of the region. More concretely, I investigate, following this introduction, how and why these different modes of articulation of traumatic experiences are employed in the chosen texts. I am cognisant of the

[3] This is why Akin Adesokun's essay "New African Writing and the Question of Audience" remains quite relevant especially in relation to the popularity or critical acclaim texts translated into English receive in Western Europe and North America. In his view, a text "written originally in [a European language other than English] and thematising a particular kind of postcolonial reality becomes assimilated to the phenomenon of successful critical reception in the United States upon translation into English" ("New" 2). Riffing through Pierre Bourdieu, Adesokun sees in this a clear manifestation of the emergence of English as a (preferred) global language and a medium through which "cultural capital" is reproduced.

Foucauldian understanding of "discourse" as reflecting the way "the over-all 'discursive' fact'" is used "to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said" (*History* 11). Inasmuch as there is a dearth of critical engagement with the selected primary texts, I am sympathetic to Foucault's views on the workings of discourse, which I come back to in the central chapters of this study. My main concern will be to explore how the texts articulate the civil war discourse, the debates and countervailing arguments that have been dedicated to this discourse, the people who have studied or 'textualised' trauma and the cultural productions that have arisen out of it.

The focus on 2000-2014 arises from the recognition that this is part of a period proposed by Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw as the age of trauma because of the way trauma "has become a portmanteau term that covers a variety of disparate experiences [where] [s]tories that would seem to belong to different orders of experience enjoy troubling intimacies" (1-2). Miller and Tougaw also speak of the current age as sparking an 'addiction' to narratives of pain and suffering, and the migration of private zones of the body into public domains. In their view, we seem to live "in a culture of trauma [where] accounts of extreme situations sell books;" where, they argue, "narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion" (2). Their views find further resonance in Patricia Yaeger's essay "Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating" (2002), which extends the debate to include academics as well. In Yaeger's view, "we inhabit an academic world that is busy consuming trauma – eating, swallowing, perusing, consuming, exchanging, circulating, creating professional connections – through stories about the dead" (29). This view, that the academy and writers seem addicted to the production and consumption of genres that are carriers of the trauma story, prompts Yaeger to ask: "Given the danger of commodification and the pleasures of academic melancholy – of those exquisite acts of mourning that create a conceptual profit – what are our responsibilities when we write about the dead? … What happens when we 'textualize' bodies, when we write about other people's deaths (or other people's cultures) as something one 'reads"'? (29; parentheses in original). It enables me to further ask: How do writers speak about the pain of others? Or speak about their own pain and losses? What new dialogues do they establish between existing narratives of trauma and Eastern African contexts, histories and memories of pain and violence?

In order to answer these questions, I draw on the tools provided by the field of Trauma Studies (discussed in the theoretical subsection below) to explore the effects of intra-state conflict on individuals, groups or whole societies. This is because depictions of horrific memories of victims of war have either been reduced to symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or as witness statements about the horrors of war. I explore both notions in this study. I speculate that in some of the selected texts the consequences of the trauma victims suffer from are depicted in terms of the standard symptoms of PTSD; while in others the symptoms include the victims' inability to develop a coherent sense of identity or belonging, which, then, reduces them to becoming liminal and/or hybrid identities. Apart from the two aspects of trauma that all the texts have in common, there is also the trope of the journey. I argue that this journey is both physical and psychological. As already alluded to, there is a forced physical flight of the authors and their compatriots both within their natal homes as well as across national borders into neighbouring countries and other far-flung places. But there is also a mental or psychological quest to leave home for the author-narrators in all the texts. Here, I construct the author-narrators' intrusive recollections of what they went through as an escape into imaginary safe havens, away from the danger lurking around them. The nature of this journey and the trauma it leads to is what will be discovered in the detailed analysis of the texts, especially in Chapters Two and Five of this study.

In literary studies, reflections on representation of atrocities and traumatic memories are believed to produce some of the most influential and far-reaching new insights about the human condition. Leaning on Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman and Shoshana Felman, but also on insights culled from writers such as Dominick LaCapra and Theodor Adorno, among others, I argue that the literary is well disposed to document and bear witness to traumatic experiences. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra theorises the relationship between history and trauma fictions. He argues that "the literary (or even art in general) is a prime, if not the privileged, place for giving voice to trauma" (190; parentheses in original). In the same vein, Hartman intones that "Trauma study in the arts explores the relation between psychic wounds and signification" ("Trauma" 257). Hartman is of the view that "as a specific literary endeavour trauma study in the arts explores the relation of words and wounds;" that "its main focus is on words that wound, and presumably can be healed, if at all, by further words" ("Trauma" 259). Here, Hartman seems to believe in the power of art to represent the unspeakable. Also, Adorno, in "Commitment" (1982), recognises the unique

place of art in representing suffering and pain. In a rare praise[4] for art, he appears to say that "it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it…. It is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics" ("Commitment" 318). His designation of art as a better vehicle for conveying suffering and pain suggests art's ability to bring out those heartrending scenes through use of language. Finally, Caruth designates psychoanalysis, sociology and literature as privileged forms of writing that "are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma" ("Introduction" 4) due to their affinity to metaphorical representation. In all these instances trauma is understood in a broad sense as a narrativised experience; as interpretation. The task of the reader is to "discover these wounds in the words provided by the literary texts, as well as in non-literary accounts, dealing with traumatic experiences" (Pellicer-Ortín 6).

In effect, then, this study keys into the trauma story as echoed through works of art. In the words of Richard Mollica, the trauma story is everywhere around us; it is "shared by our spouses, relatives, friends, workmates, the media, and from the pulpits of our religious institutions" (*Healing* 35). Mollica then proposes four defining features of the trauma story:

> First, the story recounts factually what happened, communicating the series of events that triggered their trauma. Second, the story communicates broader socio-cultural elements, portraying the history, traditions, and values that underlie the narrative.… Third, the story involves [the survivor] 'looking behind the curtain' of daily life and reflecting on the deeper (personal and societal) implications of their suffering.… Lastly, the trauma story involves building a relationship with a listener – public testimony is healing not only for those who share their stories, but also for those who listen (qtd. in Schick 1850).

In view of Mollica's thoughts on what should account for the trauma story, I read the selected literary texts as trauma narratives. Specifically, I interrogate how the authors narrate the trauma story through literary devices that create, in Primo Levi's words, "a sorrowful, cruel and moving story …, full of a tragic, disturbing necessity" in the reader (*If This* 72). I make two propositions: first, that the affective images depicted in the selected fictional and autobiographical narratives function as vehicles for informing the 'outside world' about the human rights atrocities that have happened in the selected Eastern African (con)texts. The

[4] I use the words 'rare praise' here because, as I discuss later in this section, Adorno is largely pessimistic about the role of art and artists in rendering traumatic human experiences.

texts also function as processes that aid subjects to have access to the past, reintegrate it in their self, start a new life, re-emerge with a new self from the traumatic experience, and re-join his or her society or community. Here, my thoughts cohere with those of Pellicer-Ortín, who also maintains that "fictional and limit-case autobiographies are useful tools for the representation and healing of trauma" (*Eva* 246). Literature, in her view, "is not an abstract entity but an active sphere of society where current identities and conflicts are continuously being redefined and rethought" (*Eva* 246). This understanding points to literature as a site for the representation of traumatic human experiences. I also suggest that engagement with and textualization of the trauma story draws us into the ethics of representing suffering and cruelty. As I have already intimated, the question with such forms of representation is what is the author's responsibility when he/she represents the pain of others.

In "Race and Ethnicity as Political Identities in the African Context" (2004), Mahmood Mamdani speaks of "a pornography of violence" that seems to be the defining feature for most writings that claim to represent trauma today. In his view, we seem to live in an age where writers venture into the trauma industry – literally as a business – to commodify stories of pain and suffering. In doing this, they objectify trauma by manipulating, distorting and fabricating images of pain and suffering so that they can fetch better prices or attract a wide readership. Mamdani worries that ours is voyeuristic age where representation of "senseless violence is a feature of other people's cultures: where they are violent, but we are pacific, and where a focus of their debasedness easily turns into another way of celebrating and confirming our exalted status" (13). The trauma thus mediated is viewed with a sense of what Hartman calls "matter-of-fact[ness], a natural rather than manmade catastrophe," which does not initiate action, but rather a feeling of moral indifference" (*Longest* 100). Adorno seems to stand at the side of Mamdani in his critique of artists who presume to speak on behalf of victims and art's inability to "stand upright before injustice (313)." He condemns "the aesthetic principle of stylization" in art (313), which transforms the fate of the victims in such a way as to remove its horror. Insofar as it mobilizes suffering for the enjoyment of the reader or the spectator, art "does an injustice to the victims": it "make[s] an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed" (313). Adorno reiterates his earlier claim: "I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" – but goes on to complicate or even contradict it by adding that "literature must resist this verdict" as "[i]t is now virtually in art alone that

suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it" (313). In all these criticisms, we return to the limits of representation of trauma.

I certainly do not imply that the selected writers either consciously or unconsciously follow this path. However, I do think it is important to point out that the authors strategically manipulate and embellish events to suit a particular readership. As Hayden White argues, art transfigures reality through what he calls emplotment to construct a narrative. Emplotment reorders reality, valorising some aspects over others. I contend, qua White, that it is difficult for traumatising events to stay out of reach of manipulation or distortion. The events get absorbed into a mesh of meaning making as writers or witnesses try to make sense of what could have happened, or what happened. This is besides the politics of production that seem to place extra demands on writers and witnesses to tell their story differently. I engage with these issues in detail in individual chapters of this study.

Eastern Africa is home to some of the continent's most intractable civil conflicts, prompting Yunusy Ng'umbi to observe that most of the countries of the region have been "blacklisted by global communities such as the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the African Union (AU) as unstable nations because of continued civil wars, coups, violence, genocide, drought and famine that have resulted in the migration of people" (154). This has generated a prolific body of critical studies and debates. In this study, I trace how Eastern African writers imagine these postcolonial realities. Owing to their publication dates, most of the texts selected for analysis have enjoyed little critical attention. This means that, to borrow Susan Gubar's words, I oftentimes "worked without the safety net of other critics' assessments, [and] had to hazard readings that remain tentative" (*Poetry* xvii) and, at times, speculative on the representation of civil wars in the region. It is important to note, however, that the selected texts are set in a region that has generated a lot of critical attention – especially in the media, history, anthropology and political science – because of the crises it has endured. In the course of this study, I will flag a few of these studies to the specific question of literary representation of suffering, with a view to exploring how Eastern African fictional and autobiographical works narrate civil wars, ethnic animosity, brutal dictatorships and genocide.

Accounts from journalists add nuance to our understanding of how individual countries were caught up in the violent conflicts, notably from the position of Western journalists. These

accounts are not representative of individual experiences of the intra-state conflicts but instead are better interpreted for how they provide insight into the nature of the moral discourse surrounding the conflicts. Of note is journalist Scott Peterson's *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* (2001) which gives a detailed context of the "war crimes" (xiv) that engulfed Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda in the 1990s and their impact on the civilian population. Peterson uses the three countries as a prop to rethink "the extremes [of war and violence] as they can and do exist in Africa" (xiv). In his text, Peterson establishes a dangerous, if not vapid, correlation between Africa and "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death" (xvii), which he claims are a common occurrence on the continent. He signals, for example, the various conflicts he might have witnessed as "the most vicious" and that they have "created the most suffering" (xiii) to substantiate his views. A look at the figures and incidents of war and violence in Africa lead one to conclude that Peterson is not entirely wrong in his observations. In some of the countries under study, war crimes have been a common occurrence in the last half century and unearthing evidence of these injustices as mediated in literature is worthy of examination.

As suggested, locating an exhaustive critical response on the chosen texts is one of the challenges I faced in this study. Instead, this chapter engages with the more modest, but essential task of tracing some of the key projects on literary evocations of violent conflicts in some of the countries in the region. Of particular note are three studies on Rwanda. First, is Kate O'Neill's "The Decolonizing Potential of Local and Metropolitan Literature of the Rwandan Genocide" (2012), a rare study that "attempt[s] to bridge the socio-political distance between Rwandan and Western citizens" (ii). O'Neill locates her study in postcolonial theory, trauma theory, and scholarship in the area of national identity "to parse the role of these texts in recovering a productive sense of Rwandan identity for Western readers" (iii). Her suggestion is that "these narratives have the potential to enable Western citizens to recognize and challenge the role of the superstructure in shaping public discourse about the Rwandan Genocide" (iii). What is interesting in O'Neill's study is the dialectics of race and ethnicity in discourses of national identity, which I draw on to examine how colonial and Western ideals on ethnic and racial superiority shape ideas on home and belonging, and inclusion and exclusion in the three Rwandan texts, with reference to how Rwandans feel about themselves, about their leaders, and, for those who were forced to leave their natal homes because of the pogroms, about their host societies. Often sufferers themselves, the selected authors depict racial and ethnic tension as intrusive and compelling, and as leading

to feelings of resentment and suspicion for each other. The Rwandan context is also true of texts from Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, where the authors engage with similar notions.

Another notable study on Rwanda is Karin Samuel's "Bearing Witness to Trauma: Representations of the Rwandan Genocide" (2010) which focuses on representations of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its aftermath in selected literary and filmic narratives. Samuel explores the different ways in which narrative devices are used to convey trauma, thereby enabling us to bear witness to it. Although this study resonates with some of Samuels' findings on the 1994 genocide, it expands its frame of reference to examine representations of trauma in pre- and post-1994 massacres in Rwanda. Finally, there is Arther Rwafa's "Contesting Cultural and Political Stereotypes in the Language of Genocide in Selected Rwandan Films" (2010), which, as the title suggests, contests political and cultural stereotypes depicted through the verbal and audio-visual languages used to represent the Rwandan genocide. Rwafa's views on cultural stereotypes inform my argument on "predatory identities"[5] not only in Rwanda but also in all the selected countries, and my contention that the authors from these countries fall back on historical archives to frame their historical revisions of the various genocides that have happened in the history of their individual societies.

A few overarching patterns that focus on the crises in the specific countries of the region also proved useful to this study. Some of them are: Gérard Prunier's *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (2009) and *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* (2005). In the former, Prunier analyses the impact of post-1994 Rwandan conflicts; while in the latter, he provides a compelling context for the violence in Darfur and sketches the position of the conflict within the politics of Sudan and the region. I zoom in on the issues raised in Prunier's texts in the actual analyses of the texts on Rwanda, Sudan and South Sudan, with a view to exploring how the notion of "predatory identities" plays out in the three countries. Alcinda Honwana's *Child Soldiers in Africa* (2006), Katunga Minga's "Child Soldiers as Reflected in the African Francophone War Literature of the 1990s and 2000s" (2012) and Edgar Nabutanyi's "Representations of Troubled Childhoods in Selected Post-1990 African Fiction in English" (2013) focus on the complex realities of child

[5] Arjun Appadurai's understanding of "predatory identities" is that they are "those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we" (*Fear* 51).

soldiering in Africa. I find this body of critical review, albeit not necessarily on the chosen texts, is productive in my reflection on the general trajectory of the social crises in the region. Overall, my study builds on this body of growing research, to focus on the literary representations of civil war traumas in East African contexts.

While the studies on Eastern Africa reviewed above examine the contradictions of nation formation, (trans)national identities, gendered nationalism and racial/ethnic animosity, among others, to reveal the subtle and indigenised ways in which certain forms of power play out in (post)repressive Eastern African nation-states (Simatei 2001; Kayhana 2014; Spencer 2014), I posit that less scholarly attention has been focused on "narratives [that] chronicle conditions of oppression, assemble experiential histories of psychic degradation and bodily assault, register the aftereffects of survival and mourning, and commemorate victims who cannot give testimony" (Smith and Watson "Witness" 592). It is this research gap that I seek to address.

1.2. Theoretical Framework and Points of Departure

Trauma has become an important field of study over the years because of the increasing levels of phobias and their effects on the individual psyche, and is currently being pursued in numerous disciplines across the academy. *Trauma* – a term from the Greek *traumatikos* (meaning 'wound' or 'an external bodily injury') – first came to prominence in psychoanalytic studies in the late nineteenth century, through the works of three thinkers: Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and Sigmund Freud. These figures studied the cause of hysteria in their society (Herman 9). The nineteenth-century French neurologist Charcot was the first to venture into this subject. Freud later built on Charcot's ideas, that hysteria was the result of traumatic experiences. Focusing his study on the cause of neurosis in hysterical women, Freud noted a number of symptoms in his patients which made him conclude that such symptoms must have a psychological explanation. Since Charcot and Freud's ground-breaking work, the term trauma has acquired new permutations such that today it is no longer limited to a 'physical wound,' but carries within it notions of a 'psychic wound' as well. We now refer to trauma from a psychological perspective to describe "nonphysical social and psychological injuries to the mind and spirit" (Mollica 36). This definition affirms Judith Herman's perception that trauma is an event that "overwhelm[s] the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" (*Trauma* 33). This event, Herman argues, has the power of damaging the self: "[t]he traumatic event … destroys the belief that one can *be oneself* in relation to others" (*Trauma* 53; original emphasis). Hence, in

Herman's view, even though the individual may survive the trauma, the indelible effect of trauma significantly alters the person's psychological and physical life: "Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe" (*Trauma* 44). This leads to a fragmentation in the survivor's perception of self, reality, emotions, and memories. Herman further observes that the kind of fragmentation trauma causes "tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion" (*Trauma* 34).

As a field of study and literary theory, trauma was popularised in the last quarter of the twentieth century when a group of critics associated with the Yale School of Deconstruction began to adapt medical ideas on psychic traumatic processes and apply these ideas in the analysis of narrative texts, thereby inaugurating what we know as Trauma Studies today (Pellicer-Ortín 10). Amongst these critics, Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) stands out as a landmark and constant point of reference in the development of trauma studies in the field of literary theory (Toremans 336). This is besides her other path-breaking works either as an author in "Introduction to Psychoanalysis and Trauma" (1991) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) or an editor in *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* (1991). In all these works, Caruth bases her observations on her reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Moses and Monotheism* and *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. Her goal is to expand the understanding of literature through an analysis of traumatic experience, for "literature, like psychoanalysis," in her view, "is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (*Unclaimed* 3). Caruth begins by pointing out the original meaning of trauma as "an injury inflicted on a body" (*Unclaimed* 3). She then provides the general definition of trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (*Unclaimed* 91). Caruth also proposes that all traumas have a "moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is released … through the wound" (*Unclaimed* 2). This voice "witnesses a truth that [the survivor] cannot fully know" (*Unclaimed* 3; Tembo, "Traumatic" 52). In that sense, trauma's full impact is only known much later because the mind recognises the threat "one moment too late" missing the experience altogether (*Unclaimed* 62). Belatedness, latency, the difficulties of gaining access to the traumatic story, and the unspeakability of trauma implicit in its aporetic nature, then, are some of the essential

concepts that Caruth constantly emphasises on for the understanding of the representation of trauma in literature. What becomes clear when studying her work is her firm belief that literature is the site where the dialectic process of knowing and not knowing the traumatic past can be represented and analysed by psychoanalytical methods (Pellicer-Ortín 11).

Since Caruth's formative thoughts on the application of psychic traumatic processes in literature and art, a few notable researchers have also fostered a critical view, albeit in a very different approach, towards Trauma Studies. These scholars have particularly weighed in on Caruth's notion of trauma as untreatable by, among other things, bringing theories of healing into conversation with the other explications of trauma. This is demonstrated in such seminal works as *Testimony* (1992) by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) by Judith Herman, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) by Dominick LaCapra, *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001) by Leigh Gilmore, *Empathic Vision* (2005) by Jill Bennett, *Healing Invisible Wounds* (2006) by Richard Mollica and *Healing Our Deepest Wounds* (2012) by Stanislav Grof. What seems to cut across all these texts is the authors' conviction that verbalising the experience of suffering is a crucial step for the traumatised person's recovery process. As Hartman suggests, literary verbalisation "remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible" ("Trauma" 259). In his view, "literature could be viewed as a talking cure to a higher degree" ("Trauma" 259; note 6). Endorsing this line of thought is the feminist trauma theorist Judith Herman, whose text is rooted in the understanding of trauma and its victims. She is concerned to review the main traumatic disorders from neurosis and shell shock by "develop[ing] concepts that apply equally" to the experiences of the various groups of people dealing with posttraumatic stress disorders (*Trauma* 4). Unlike Caruth who emphasises the impossibility of putting trauma into words, and who maintains that there is a lasting effect that leaves traumatised people always vulnerable and constantly struggling to reclaim their memories in a form which is bearable to them (*Unclaimed* 91-92), Herman sees the construction of a narrative after trauma as a way of helping the individual through that experience towards a position of recovery. Herman establishes three main symptoms of traumatic disorders: "hyperarousal," "intrusion" and "constriction." She also distinguishes three main stages in the recovery from trauma: "safety," "remembrance and mourning" and "reconnection with ordinary life" (*Trauma* 155). She claims that the last two stages can be represented in literature by showing characters that struggle to transform their traumatic memories into narrative memories (Pellicer-Ortín 20).

Herman's work (and that of the other scholars flagged above) echoes Freudian therapeutic methods, especially literature that equates the ability to share one's story to that of the talking cure. The general understanding behind the term, according to Stephen Lepore and Joshua Smyth, is that "identification, exploration, and expression of stress-related thoughts and feelings [through talking] helps relieve ailments associated with traumatic experiences" in the victim ("Writing" 3). A related term, especially when applied in reference to writing as a form of catharsis, is "scriptotherapy." Stemming from the Latin roots *scriptum*, meaning "thing written" and *therapia*, which means "to nurse or cure," scriptotherapy was coined by Suzette Henke to denote "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (*Shattered* xii). Henke also endorses the Freudian talking cure, and argues that the act of talking could be replaced by the act of writing in order to heal the traumatised soul (*Shattered* xi). These definitions point to literature and art as healing mechanisms, both for the author-narrators as well as the readers or viewers, and as modes that ccould help reconstruct the self after a traumatic process. As Henke further explains, the aim of the testimonial process of scriptotherapy is linked to psychoanalytical healing practices such as psychotherapy, counselling, group therapy, or the talking cure itself, as its main objective is to reconstruct the subject after trauma has caused a deep breach in the psyche, by integrating traumatic memories into narrative ones (qtd. in Pellicer-Ortín 49).

It is within this trauma discourse that I contextualise my study. In some parts, I employ narrative devices of trauma fiction, which are fashioned around Caruth's claims around symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) as the basic foundations for my understanding of the selected texts. In others, I make recourse to notions of the talking or writing cure as advanced in the works of Freud, Hartman, Felman, Herman, Henke and Gilmore, to explore individual and personal experiences of trauma in this study. Like Pellicer-Ortín, however, I do not envision healing as a final ideal state that can be fully achieved, but rather as a process that enables the subject to have access to the past, reintegrate it in his or her self, start a new life, re-emerge with a new self from the traumatic experience, and re-join his or her society or community. Pellicer-Ortín's understanding it that "it is within this process that literary and other similar writing practices can act out, articulate, and work through the trauma of victims, witnesses, and contemporary society at large" (*Eva* 53). Hence while my reading of trauma is that it is an indelible scar (which gestures towards the phenomenon of resisting any form of healing, as suggested by Caruth), I also tease out its therapeutic mode in some of the texts to show that trauma bears traces of 'treatability' or

'healability' in its victims. Most important of all, I contend that trauma narratives extend beyond trauma as the subject of the book or as character studies about traumatised individuals. Instead, they express "the processes, obstacles, and instabilities of living with and communicating trauma within the narratives' structures and approaches" (Passalacqua 5). Hence, by titling this study "Trauma in Selected Eastern African Fiction and Life Writing," I mean to suggest that the selected authors highlight the power of literature and art to not only make sense of the violence inflicted on individuals and groups but also to suggest Henke's notion of "narrative recovery" that is evoked in them through what she calls "narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject" (*Shattered* xxii). Henke's words support my conviction, qua Pellicer-Ortín, that "artistic manifestations in general, and literature in particular, can represent traumatic experiences, or are at least able to represent the attempts to come to terms with trauma" (*Eva* 53).

Besides notions borrowed from Trauma Studies, I also draw on concepts from many other related disciplines; an aspect which provides this study with a rich interdisciplinary background. These include: postcolonial criticism, life writing theories, and theories of truth and memory. I briefly summarise these interpretive frameworks in the rest of this section, beginning with postcolonial theory. In literature, what is known as postcolonial criticism is both a subject matter and a theoretical framework. As a subject matter, it analyses postcolonial literatures produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination. As a theoretical framework, it attempts to understand political, social, cultural and psychological operations as well as colonialist and the anti-colonialist ideologies. Considering that postcolonial theory is a widely-debated field involving a great number of theorists, this study is largely motivated by Ato Quayson's thoughts on the potential of using a psychoanalytic framework to interpret postcolonial African contexts of violence. I hold that due to the fraught nature of traumatic history and the extant nature of violence in the selected Eastern African contexts, one needs to rethink and extend many of the current scholarly debates on the future of postcolonial Eastern Africa. In my view, this future cannot be fully explicated in the absence of a psychoanalytic framework of interpreting the African postcolonial moment. Of his numerous works on the subject, the most relevant for my purposes is *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* (2003). In Chapter Four of this seminal text, Quayson "conjoins Freud's notions of trauma to those of the uncanny" (81) to examine how postcolonial African literature interrogates nation and narration (76). He begins by observing that "there is often a cross-mapping of literature onto national politics" (76), and that "the

African postcolony is a place not of any straightforward political and social integration but rather of violence and death such that to attempt to transcend this space of death requires a careful understanding of the trauma that in fact produced the nation in the first place and that … is still pertinent to its understanding across the continent" (77). What is most fascinating about Quayson's views is his reading of the African postcolonial moment *à la* Freudian echoes of latency and the uncanny. In my view these echoes are as a result of the not-so-stable democracies in some Eastern African countries, most of which appear to be recovering from the devastation wrought on the society by the crises that have happened there.

In setting up his argument, Quayson uses Dambuzo Marechera's novella *House of Hunger*, Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* to demonstrate that the visibility of the ongoing violence of the postcolony is a reflection of what he calls "symbolization compulsion," a concept he coins in reference to "a repeated feature in literary texts detailing traumatic states" ("Symbolization" 754), or "a narrative means of coping with the burden of traumatic memory" (*Calibrations* 89). Quayson thinks that the violence of the postcolony manifests itself "at both the level of content and of form" (*Calibrations* 83). At the level of content, the postcolonial African literary text often manifests such descriptions as "fights, beatings, bloodshed, and illnesses" (83), while at the level of form one is bound to encounter a "theater of horrific phantasms, whose nightmarish quality reflects the incoherences of the external world itself" (83). This puts us in mind of Mbembe's notion of the postcolony, especially his examination of what he describes as "the ecstatic structures of power, that is, … those instances where suffering, pain and jubilation paradoxically meet each other and, in the process, seriously limit the freedom to act with sincerity" (qtd. in Hofmeyr 180). Mbembe's reworking of Michel Foucault's notions of "biopower" and "biopolitics" in *On the Postcolony* (2001) provides a fruitful pattern to understand the narrative representation of individual and collective trauma. Though rarely read as a trauma theorist, Mbembe draws attention to crucial, yet often overlooked, episodes in the history of trauma: contemporary forms of violence produced by dysfunctional leaderships by postcolonial wars, and, more diffusely, by upheavals, instabilities and tribulations that seem to define the African postcolony. Ultimately, this study responds to the psychological impact of postcolonial violence that I, qua Mbembe, speculate to lie underneath the mask of power in postcolonial Eastern African contexts.

Together with the premises of Trauma Studies and postcolonial theory, notions of truth and memory cut across this study. This is because over half of the texts studied here focus on "narrative truth," in Donald Spence's terms,[6] as told by the author-narrators who recall from memory to verbalise their (compatriots') traumatic experiences during the intra-state conflicts that happened in their lifetime. In a way, then, I also explore how the two interpretive frameworks are used to provide new insights into life writing in order to discover how different literary techniques are put into service by writers to mediate civil war contexts in Eastern Africa.

In *The Nature of Narrative* ([1966] 2006), Robert Scholes et al. propose a useful term for understanding literary narratives that focus on events that are assumed to have actually occurred. Calling such genres "empirical narratives," they suggest two main components of these narratives: the *historical* and the *mimetic*. The historical component, in their view, "owes its allegiance specifically to truth of fact and to the actual past rather than to a traditional version of the past," while the mimetic component "owes its allegiance not to truth of fact but to truth of sensation and environment, depending on observation of the present rather than investigation of the past" (13). Typically, empirical narratives purport to be 'pure' utterances and 'authentic' transmissions of a lived or observed experience. The reason why 'authenticity' is often invoked in evaluating witness narratives as both a criterion and a test of their transparency, validity, and efficacy in campaigns for redress of injustice is, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, because it is the vehicle through which they are produced, circulated and received both locally and internationally ("Witness" 593). Smith and Watson (citing Hua Hsu) outline five "metrics of authenticity" which, they suggest, "are produced internally at the intersection of the witness's singular experiential history and the shared communal discourses and narrative rhetorics through which that experiential history unfolds, and externally through the production, marketing, and circulation of witness narratives for transnational publics" ("Witness" 593).

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[6] Donald Spence has played an essential role in making us aware of the centrality of narrative truth in works of literature and art. Spence defines narrative truth as "the criterion we use to decide when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction" (31). The premise of Spence's thoughts is that all creative efforts are "guided by narrative tradition;" that, "as the vague outlines [of these creative efforts] take on form and substance, they also acquire a coherence and a representational appeal, which give them a certain kind of reality" (31). For Spence, then, "narrative truth is what we have in mind when we say that such and such is a good story, that a given explanation carries a conviction, that *one* solution to a mystery must be true" (31). Narrative truth is a context of justification, specifically an explication we give "when we describe our cases, when we publish our reports, and when we find evidence for corroborating theory" (33). For details, see Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (Norton), 1982.

As already alluded to, seven of the twelve texts analysed in this study mirror the empirical or witness narrative scenario; hence the 'truth' mediated in them needs further interrogation here. For my engagement with notions of truth in these texts, I draw on the ideas of Ana Douglass. In "The Menchú Effect: Strategic Lies and Approximate Truths in Texts of Witness" (2003), Douglass is of the view that when it comes to mediating truth, "texts of witness are best talked about in terms of their proximity to 'truths' and the various rhetorical strategies enacted to achieve the 'effect' of representing in language events that border upon the unspeakable" (82). I affirm Douglass's views here and I appropriate them in my argument that life writing possesses an "undeniable value" since it brings the readership "into some dialogue with a distant 'other'" ("Menchú" 87). For Douglass, then

> It would be a horrible overcorrection of our critical approach to these important texts if we were simply to discount them out of hand. What we need to reconsider is the role of the Western reader in creating an unreasonable set of expectations for what constitutes 'authenticity' of speech. What we need to rethink is the boundary between historical fact and literary truth, the belief systems that inform each version of truth – historical and universal – the politics that inform these belief systems, and how language represents (or fails to represent) truth. (81-82; parentheses in original)

I read Douglass's assertions as a response to those who dismiss witness narratives (read autobiographies here) and notions of authority, authenticity and representations of truth in them. Among the pioneer critics of autobiography's treachery is Freud. In a 1929 letter addressed to Edward Bernays, Freud is on record to have told his nephew that "what makes all autobiographies worthless is, after all, their mendacity." This is because, in his view, a "psychologically complete and honest confession of life … would require so much indiscretion … about family, friends, and enemies" (*Letters* 391). And in another letter this time to Arnold Zweig in 1936, Freud maintains that "anyone turning biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, and even to hiding his own lack of understanding, *for biographical truth is not to be had, and even if it were it couldn't be used*" (*Letters* 430; my emphasis). Freud's thoughts shatter the autobiographical project. Autobiographical truth, in Freud's view, is unobtainable.

A number of scholars, including Paul John Eakin, Michaela Maftei and Michael Chaney, among others, respond to Freud's ideas. In *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), for example, Eakin is of the view that autobiographical truth is, as the

subtitle of his book implies, an act of self-invention. It (i.e. the truth) "is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation" (3). Eakin maintains that "the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (3) and that "fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived and of any art devoted to the presentation of that life" (5). Thus, in his view, "it is as reasonable to assume that all autobiography has some fiction in it" (10). A more recent writer that seems to support this line of thinking is Maftei, who also probes the idea of truth as advanced in autobiographies. In *The Fiction of Autobiography* (2013), Maftei seems to say that what critics suggest is the truth of fiction (as Chinua Achebe would put it) is "a (flexible, changeable) state of mind rather than a measurable outcome" (2; parentheses in original). Maftei implies that even though autobiographies "are commonly held to be 'true' writing" in that "they are understood to be based on events that occurred in reality" (17), whatever they advance must be regarded as the author's attempt at working with "alternate truths, alternate versions of events" (19). In her opinion, "one can only be sure of one's individual truth, the way a particular event happened to them, but this does not mean that it is the only truth they can 'work with'" (19). Following Maftei's understanding of all autobiographical writing as involving "the intersection between one's own ideas of what is true and the ideas of others" and that "even while only being able to hold fast to one's own version of events, the memoirist must incorporate the truths of others" (21), it becomes clear that in discussing truth as advanced in auto/biographical narratives one must know that that truth is in communion with other truths, intentions and beliefs. Finally, there is Chaney who hints that the veracity found in autobiographies is largely implicative and that "if not verifiably true [it is] at least emotionally truthful to the way [the authors] perceive, remember, and make sense out of their lives" (1). Chaney further argues that "how readers discern emotional verities or subjective truths depends upon a range of discourse conventions surrounding narratives of truth telling" (1).

Many of the recent works aimed at representing lived or observed experiences, including the texts of witness discussed in this study, have had one issue or another with their local (read native) audience as well as their 'ethical subjects.' They have been called to account, for example, in terms of what Smith and Watson call "the metrics of authenticity" and "additional features of production and circulation" ("Witness" 595) that are inserted in narratives of witness to 'take care' of allegations of inauthenticity, absences, lacunae, or incoherences in them, while, at the same time, asking "the sympathetic reader … to suspend

critical judgment and instead respond with uncritical empathy, as he or she identities with those positioned as victims" ("Witness" 595-96). In a sense, these issues are a result of a key related phenomenon that rings true of all narratives of witness. It is what Leigh Gilmore calls "the crucial limit in autobiography." In Gilmore's view, this is

> the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the peculiar way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously 'my' experience when 'our' experience is also at stake (*Limits* 5).

These problems of representation have prompted scholars such as Douglass to call for restraint in the criticism of narratives of witness. Douglass insists that such narratives "constitute a kind of performance during which it is not the absolute 'truth' of the witness's experience but his or her experience of 'speaking,' the speech act itself, that confronts or exceeds questions of truth" ("Menchú" 83). Therefore, even as the public contests the 'truths' in them, the writers achieve the larger symbolic truth about the situations they describe. In Douglass's view, "in texts of witness, the figure of the witness – the "I" – articulates a fundamentally social space in which his or her testimony functions as the arbiter of a larger cultural experience, one that seemingly transcends individual experience" ("Menchú" 83). Suggested here is what Sally-Ann Murray also observes, that "it is mistaken to assume, for instance, that 'I,' the first person voice, somehow constitutes a guarantee of truthfulness, or that 'she,' the third person, is marked by a narrative distance incapable of emotional identification" ("Writing" 76). Murray is of the view that "even the supposedly empirical [narrative] turns out always to be told slantedly," that, therefore, a witness narrative "cannot be an official map; it toys with memory as an uneven form of mapping at the same time as it actively works to create, in language, an elusive, personalised series of idiosyncratic sites which appear in/on no formal record" ("Writing" 76). This serves to remind us that the ostensible truth that witness narratives claim to advance is *artfully created*, by the author-narrator, with David Shields noting that 'all the moments are "moments", staged and theatrical, shaped and thematised' (*Reality* 5).

The second reason for distortions in narratives of witness raises more questions about the writers' state of memory in narrating events that happened *in the past*. That the authors choose to manipulate and embellish events makes sense if we consider that they recall *in the present* to talk about *the past*. As memory researchers from diverse fields have argued,

remembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present. The process is not a passive one of mere retrieval from a memory bank. Rather, the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering. Thus, narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered. As Ben Yagoda suggests, "memory is by nature untrustworthy: contaminated not merely by gaps, but by distortions and fabrications that inevitably and blamelessly creep into it" (*Memoir* 99). Memory's reconstruction, according to him, is partial, self-serving and faulty, and "subject to all kinds of influences, taking a heavier toll with the passage of time" (*Memoir* 103). In similar vein, Daniel Schacter states that "memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves" (*Seven* 6). In his view, there is always "a weakening or loss of memory over time" which makes us remember less and less the events that happened to us "six weeks, six months, or six years from now" (*Seven* 4). He maintains that as human beings, "we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event" (*Seven* 9).

As these examples indicate, techniques and practices of remembering change. How people remember, what they remember, and who does the remembering are historically specific. In the same way as with these techniques and practices of remembering, writers cobble together memories to create a form of representation that recalls from memory to construct a story that purportedly happened. This recollection of events from memory is highlighted in all memoirs and autobiographies, which illustrates the way that the past can be reimagined and reconstructed as a way of processing traumatic human experiences. Yagoda proposes that, in written narratives, memory "is itself a creative writer, cobbling together 'actual' memories, beliefs about the world, cues from a variety of sources, and memories of *previous* memories to plausibly imagine what might have been, and then, in a master stroke, packaging this scenario to the mind as the real one" (*Memoir* 103). The critical position that Yagoda and Schacter assume here demonstrates a generalised concern with the capriciousness of memory; one that leads me to say that life writing authors covered in this study might be trying, both consciously and subconsciously, to reconstruct their lived experiences from flawed memories in an endless process of canon formation in which certain narratives are privileged while others are relegated to the background.

Given such noteworthy discussions on truth, this study examines and critiques the selected texts against the different shades of truth they purport to illuminate. More concretely, my

analysis develops out of the working hypothesis that narratives of witness work with truth values. As a reader and critic, therefore, I will not privilege one form of truth over another in this study or question whether the testimonies the author-narrator give happened the way they profess they did. Rather, I discuss and affirm the narrative truths that are manifested in the texts and how they shape the narratives and the binary politics in Eastern African contexts. Hence, whatever truths the author-narrator attest in their work must be interpreted as "[lying] betwixt and between history and imagination" (Murray 77). Most important of all, I read the selected texts as literary, symbolic constructions of the author-narrators' (and their compatriots') lived experience, which might psychologically be true beyond the empirical historical accurateness they have sometimes been construed to misrepresent.

1.3. Description of Chapters

This thesis is divided into four analytical chapters – sandwiched between the introduction (Chapter One) and the conclusion (Chapter Six) – each of which focuses on a particular strand or theme. Chapter Two is devoted to Rwandese-authored witness narratives. In this chapter, I trace how Rwandan authors imagine and contest genocide memories in their country. I pay close attention to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope to read the competing visions of remembering and forgetting the Rwandan genocides as depicted in Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears*, Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* and Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise*. I argue that the literary construction of the post-genocide Rwandan state is so much bound with historical and stereotypical labels that propagated hate memories in the build up to, and after, the 1994 Rwandan genocide; a genocide where unbiased objectivity is not to be expected in these accounts.

Chapter Three centres on the suspended identities of children exposed to and involved in organised hostilities and combat. I begin by situating China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier*, Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire* and Emmanuel Jal's *War Child* primarily in the domain of the everyday and the family home, to demonstrate how abusive childhood contexts have the potential to drive children out of their homes into the life of child soldiering. I equate this movement to what Irina Kyulanova describes as "a deviant rite of passage, which yanks the protagonists out of their childhood status [and] yet fails to grant them the new status of mature adults and integrate them into a stable social structure" (29). I then demonstrate that what is reflected in the three child soldier memoirs are images of children whose lives drift into the abyss of inhuman and degrading treatment through which we see them being abused

by both their biological parents and fellow soldiers in the different rebel movements they join. I also argue that the identity of child soldiers remains in an unending rite of passage because of the lingering stigma they receive from the societies they return to.

Scholars have observed that women cannot be divorced from all forms of nationalist processes. Chapter Four zooms in on these thoughts, to explore women's lives within the discourse of gendered nationalism. The chapter reflects on the portrayal of women's experiences, using Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls* and Halima Bashir's *Tears of the Desert*. I particularly explore the constructions of women in nationalist processes and the ways in which some of them claim agency to fight social injustice done them and their communities. I also argue that the ambiguous and less visible trauma men experience in the three texts is essential to understanding how war shapes relations between women and men. Thus although the chapter overwhelmingly centres on women's lives, I propose that an understanding of the men's lives within the given social, political and cultural spaces helps to illuminate the texts' tangled and ambitious representation of gendered experiences of trauma.

Civil wars and armed conflicts lead to movements of bodies, either within the domicile country or outside it. This is the focus of my final analytical chapter, where I engage with the concept of migration literature. Specifically, I explore how the authors of *Little Mother*, *All Our Names* and *Waiting* depict the psychic and physical rupture of dislocated bodies on the one hand, and, on the other, how the notion of "immigration … *unwrites* nation and national projects because it flagrantly displays a rejection of one national space for another more desirable location, albeit with some luggage carried over" (George 186; original emphasis). Focusing on the trope of namelessness, I illustrate how the generic portrayal of characters as a narrative strategy permits a novel understanding of migrant identities as liminal identities. I also demonstrate how immigrant identities "have no permanent abode but as they move to new places they take with them part of the old" (Simatei 186) and then use it to reinvent and reaffirm their fluid identities.

Trauma traverses various discursive sites, which are laden with metaphors of flight, insecurity, resilience and reaffirmation of one's identity. This is the kind of reading I bring in Chapter Six. I draw the reader back to the journey motif and to issues of predatory identities, in a reflection that attempts to summarise my main arguments and outline the key findings of

this study. I also highlight the difficulties I encountered during my research. I then suggest directions for future or underexplored research topics. Finally, I conclude the thesis with a discussion of the potential theoretical and methodological contributions of this research to the field of trauma studies, and to the thinking of trauma in literary studies.

Chapter Two

Trauma and the Journey Chronotope in Selected Rwandese-Authored Memoirs

2.1. Introduction

The history of Rwanda is steeped in the politics of race/ethnicity, whose roots can be traced back to the colonial period when the Germans valorised the minority Tutsi over the Hutu. When the Belgians took over at the end of the First World War, they reinforced the German policy. They are also believed to have legitimised racist ideas about the Tutsi being "black Aryans, men not too dissimilar to Europeans, more noble than savage" (Keane 13) unlike "the less-evolved Hutus" (Barnett 51). In 1933, Belgium "undertook an exhaustive census … to determine who was a Hutu and who was a Tutsi, and then handed each person an identity card that fixed once and for all their ethnic calling" (Barnett 51), an incident that Michael Mann considers to be "a deadly aid to genocide" (433). They also actively favoured the Tutsi in access to administrative posts, education, and jobs in the modern sector. As I have argued elsewhere, this configuration of distinct social identity became a cornerstone of Belgium's colonial policy, and reinforced hatred and ethnic tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda (Tembo "Paranoia" 71). Following these social gradations, "the Tutsi elite and later the 1959 Revolution and post-independence Hutu leaders appropriated the debris, the former to justify their European inspired supremacy and the latter to destroy it even as they adopted it as their ideology" (Twagilimana xviii). Thus, unknown to them, the Belgians had succeeded in fanning the flames of ethnic violence. What needs underlining here is that this violence was perpetrated by both the Hutu (who wanted to purge the remaining Tutsis in Rwanda) and the Tutsis (who formed guerrilla groups outside Rwanda, aimed at reclaiming their lost glory and returning to their country of birth). In 1961 and 1962, for example, guerrilla actions by exiled Tutsi on Hutus were staged primarily from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. In the words of Marie Béatrice Umutesi, "This attack by Tutsi guerrillas was followed by reprisals in many areas of the interior of [Rwanda]. The Tutsi who had been spared in the killings and exile of 1959 were persecuted and many were killed" (*Surviving* 9). The 1994 and 1996-97 mass atrocities (and the attendant motivations) were only a continuation of these earlier ethnic and political tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi.

Taking this discourse into account, this chapter traces how Rwandan authors (re)construct and contest genocide memories in their texts. I pay close attention to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope to read the competing visions of remembering and forgetting the Rwandan genocides as depicted in Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears: The Story of the Rwandan Genocide* (2007), Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire* ([2000] 2004) and Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* (2010). I argue that the portrayal of the fugitive mobility of the Tutsi as they were running away from the interahamwe[7] militias in Bazambanza's *Smile Through the Tears* and Chishugi's *A long Way from Paradise*, and that of the Hutu as they fled from suspected Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* positions itself in relation to the genre of the journey chronotope. There are three reasons why I dedicate a chapter on Rwanda, unlike the other central chapters in this study. In history, the Rwandan pogroms have inspired a comparatively larger body of creative works by non-Rwandese authors.[8] Unlike these creative works, I interrogate how Rwandans themselves engage with the issues that have defined their traumatic history since the colonial times. Second, the selected texts offer particularly insightful accounts of both sides of the retributive killings in Rwanda, whereas earlier texts tended to reproduce a sharp victim-perpetrator dichotomy between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Finally, the frame of reference for the chosen texts is both pre- and post-1994 Rwanda when the authors reflect on what Mahmood Mamdani calls "the geography of the genocide" (*Victims* 8) and how it plays out in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region today. That is to say, the mass killings on either side of the warring factions in Rwanda were not only confined within the boundaries of Rwanda or 1994 but spilled over into neighbouring countries as well where the fugitives were nevertheless hunted down by perpetrators of the same atrocities.

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[7] Popular discourse suggests that the interahamwe were a disaffected youth militia of President Juvénal Habyarimana's National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRNDD) that descended on Tutsi and moderate Hutu following the assassination of Habyarimana on the evening of 6 April 1994.

[8] Examples of such texts include – but are not limited to – the following: Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, Véronique Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana*, Tierno Monénembo's *The Oldest Orphan* and Julian Pierce's *Speak Rwanda*. Films (*Hotel Rwanda* and *Sometimes in April*) and documentaries (*A Good Man in Hell* and *Keepers of Memory*) have also been produced. These works often present the Tutsi as the victims and the Hutu as the génocidaires except for the moderate Hutu.

As already alluded to, the chapter is indebted to Bakhtin's insights about the discursive workings of the literary chronotope, which he defines as "the intrinsic connectedness" of time and space in literary texts (*Dialogic* 84). I read two constitutive elements of the journey chronotope as informing the selected texts. First, there is "the chronotope of the road" which is closely linked to "the motif of meeting," wherein I examine the "random encounters" and "various types of meetings on the road" (*Dialogic* 98) between the fleeing author-narrators and fellow members of their ethnic groups on the one hand, and their assailants on the other. Here, I observe with Bakhtin that "the motif of meeting" is part of the "constituent element of the plot [and] unity" (*Dialogic* 98) of the narratives under examination. Then there is the "chronotope of the threshold" which, Bakhtin believes, "can be combined with the motif of encounter" to denote the literary representation of a moment when a person is facing "the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life" (*Dialogic* 248). I adapt Bakhtin's chronotope of the threshold to suggest that we can read the various states of paranoia that the author-narrators manifest as a reflection of their crises and "breaking points" which pushes them over the edge and compels them to distrust members of the other ethnic group. I thus suggest that the journey trope is a marker of the quest to leave Rwanda prior to, during, and after the genocides, and that the journeys that the author-narrators and members of their ethnic groups make are their desire to make sense of the violence in Rwanda. I also argue that the selected authors use chronotopes of the journey "as prisms, refracting the contexts that have given rise to [their] texts and the worldviews expressed in them" (Hansen 18).

The chapter is structured in three sections, all of which draw on Sigmund Freud, Michael Ignatieff and Arjun Appadurai's thoughts on intergroup relations to make sense of the selected authors' portrayal of the reasons behind the genocides in Rwanda. Freud is often recognised as one of the earliest theorists of intergroup relations. Freud observes that intergroup relations are often marked by the group members' positive feelings about their own group and negative feelings about other groups. He attributes this to the basic nature of human emotions that, in his view, are guided by the unconscious motives of love and hostility. One way in which intergroup relations are projected in society is through what he calls the "narcissism of minor differences," the feeling that it is "precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them" (*Taboo* 199). Among the writers and critics who have weighed in on Freud's formative thoughts, I focus on ideas of Michael Ignatieff and Arjun Appadurai.

Their works reveal a remarkable degree of agreement between them on the existence of what Appadurai calls "the preemptive quality" of in-group violence against the out-group: "Let me kill you before you kill me" appears to guide this relationship ("Dead Certainty" 244).

I focus on these thoughts to suggest that notions of in-groups against out-groups are firmly embedded in most social imaginaries about the causes of the Rwandan genocides, and that the selected authors tap into deep reservoirs of Rwanda's colonial history and denigrating myths to narrate the fugitive mobility of both the Tutsi and the Hutu in their narratives. In Bazambanza's text, for example, epochal events are alluded to and then conflated with the author's lived reality during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In his re-vision of Rwanda's past and present, Bazambanza situates "individual tragedy in a political context" (High *Oral* 184) and uses Rwanda's denigrating myths to express the trauma of the Tutsi in his book. Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise*, at one level a continuation of Bazambanza's thread of argument, specifically reflects the stubborn persistence of paranoia and haunting, again for Tutsi fugitives who feel that they are under threat within and outside Rwanda. I argue that this paranoia is the basis of the continued mistrust between the Hutu and the Tutsi and the lack of a genuine post-genocide reconciliation in Rwanda today. Finally, I appropriate Michel Foucault's notion of "parrhesia" and recontextualise it in my examination of how Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* inscribes what Aliko Songolo fears to be the other Rwanda genocide that followed the 1994 massacres. The emphasis here is on how Umutesi creates a rhetorical narrative space that represents and contests one-sided genocide memories in Rwanda. I argue in this section, following Susan Thomson, that "Tutsi are rightfully and correctly survivors of genocide as they were targeted by virtue of their ethnicity, but all Rwandans are survivors of conflict, jostled and shaped by events over which they had little control" (*Whispering* 21). I uphold that it is this moral that Umutesi presents in her memoir.

2.2. 'Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing' to Trauma: Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears*

> Aesthetic wit(h)nessing [is] a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter. Art becomes a keeper of historical memory for the injured other by creating the site for a novel trans-subjective and transhistorical process that is simultaneously witness and wit(h)ness – Pollock "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma"

Most writers of traumatic human experiences are not just witnesses but also share in the pain of the victim/s. My reading of Rupert Bazambanza's graphic memoir interrogates this sense

of sharing from the subject-position of an author who was with a family whose near-total annihilation he witnessed,[9] hence my appropriation of Griselda Pollock's concept of "aesthetic wit(h)nessing" in the section heading above (which I explain in detail in the subsequent paragraphs). I interrogate how Bazambanza draws from the historical archive and from his own lived experiences to bear witness to the trauma of the Rwanga family and, broadly, the Tutsi nation, in *Smile Through the Tears*. I also explore how the author combines different narrative styles with the journey chronotope to rewrite the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Smile Through the Tears is a graphic memoir.[10] The text itself is a sequential frame story, with the external historical-cum-oral memory narrative illuminating the events that unfold in the inner one. The inner story is a narrative about "the pre- and mid-genocide lives of the Rwangas, a victimized Tutsi family that the author had known since childhood" (Glover 106). As Bazambanza himself recounts in the Preface to his memoir,

> My story is told from the point of view of a family very dear to me whose near-total annihilation I witnessed: the Rwangas…. I was in hiding with them and I lost them, without understanding why, one beautiful April morning in 1994…. I lost them, and the only thing I could do was make them the heroes of this bitter tribute.
> The love, the memories and the despair that co-exist in me even now are what whetted my desire and spurned me on to produce this graphic account of a catastrophic event. (i)

Within the postcolonial context of Rwanda's history of violence between the Hutu and the Tutsi and the various discourses that have emerged from that history, Bazambanza's reason for writing the book is clearly stated: to graphize the trauma he and the Rwangas experienced "one beautiful morning in 1994" (i). Our entry point to Bazambanza's mediation of this trauma, so to speak, is the cover picture which juxtaposes a crying Rose Rwanga with a helpless gorilla. In the background, there is a machete, a tree being cut down and blood. In the twining of Rose and the gorilla and the blood, we begin to understand Bazambanza's framing of his overall story in ways that foreground the retrieval of particular iconographies and myths about Rwanda. In my view, the cover picture seems to suggest a shared

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[9] Rupert Bazambanza, *Smile Through the Tears: The Story of the Rwandan Genocide*. Trans. Lesley McCubbin (Soul Asylum Poetry and Publishing Inc., 2007), p. i. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[10] Graphic artist and medium vanguard Scott McCloud defines graphic novels as "sequential art." McCloud notes that within this definition lays a spectrum of possibility: juxtaposed images, iconography, and the negotiation between language and pictures (*Understanding* 189, 27, 49). I use graphic memoir (and not novel) in this study because Bazambanza's book is a witness narrative about the author's (and the Rwanga's) experiences during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

vulnerability of the Rwangas and the gorillas. It is an allusion to both the resurgence of ethnic hatred reminiscent of previous tensions in Rwanda (I discus this in detail later) and the attempt to eliminate the Rwanga family and, by extension, the Tutsi nation. The cover picture also harks back to "the animalization of the genocide victim" discourse that Jonathan Glover talks about (107), where the Tutsi were allegedly animalised as cockroaches to justify their elimination.

The memoir is dominated by the absence of Bazambanza's own voice about what he personally experienced during the 1994 genocide, with the author choosing to indirectly narrate his own memories through the Rwanga family instead. In making this revelation, Bazambanza adopts what Jessica Silva calls an "untraditional method of bearing witness by narrating his own memories through the Rwanga family" ("Graphic" 17). Silva suggests that this is possible "since [Bazambanza's] family and the Rwanga family were close friends and neighbours, and struggled to survive the genocide together in Kigali" ("Graphic" 17).[11] But should we really believe Silva's suggestions that "Rupert chose to depict the Rwanga family's experience and honour their memories as it was more meaningful and important to him than directly narrating his story" ("Graphic" 17), or that through the voice of the Rwangas, Bazambanza "inadvertently immortalized his own experiences"? ("Graphic" 19). Amy Larsen advances a different view, arguing that Bazambanza's writing style ought to be seen as "a problem of identification … faced by those who write [and] speak on behalf of those who cannot communicate or cannot do so to the same audiences in the same ways that the writer can" ("Identification" 160).

For this reason, I suggest that Bazambanza's inability to put into words his own pain compels him to narrate the pain from the perspective of a fellow victim. My argument follows recent scholarship on the question of representation in narratives of pain. Sarah Ahmed explores this notion in *The Cultural Politics of Pain* (2004), where she opines that "the ungraspability of [one's] own pain is brought to the surface by the ungraspability of the pain of others" (31). Ahmed further notes how "the sociality of pain – the 'contingent attachment' of being with others – requires an ethics … that begins with your pain," where one "act[s] only insofar as [one] appropriate[s] [another's] pain as [one's own]" (31). In short, Ahmed seems to say that

[11] This is reiterated by Bazambanza himself. In an interview he granted to David Whitehouse, Bazambanza reveals that he, his brother and the Rwangas took refuge at the Centre d'Etudes des Langues Africaines (CELA), next to the Sainte-Famille Church, "hoping for protection from the White Fathers there" (*Search* 23).

a person's inability to know the fabric of his own pain enables him to appropriate a language in which he can describe the pain of another as his own pain. Ahmed's views seem to be echoed by Elaine Scarry (in *The Body in Pain*), who also argues that a body in pain needs another person to produce language:

> Because the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language of pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but speak *on behalf* of those who are. Though there are very great impediments to expressing another's sentient distress, so are there also very great reasons why one might want to do so. (*Body* 6; original emphasis)

In both views, Ahmed and Scarry allude to lived pain as so unbearable and unshareable that it requires victims to narrate their traumatising experience through the perspective of the other in pain. Thus central to the idea of narrating lived pain is what Pollock calls "aesthetic wit(h)nessing," which, in her view, connotes "*being with*, but not assimilated to, and […] *being beside* the other in a gesture that is much more than mere ethical solidarity" (831; original emphases).

I suggest that Bazambanza's memoir foregrounds "aesthetic wit(h)nessing" by employing the secret character narrative style in which he inserts himself into the memoir by letting the Rwangas mention him by name as the narrative unfolds. This is exemplified in two incidences. The first involves a scene where Wilson Rwanga, his playmate and childhood friend, tells him that by the time the young tree he had planted "is big enough to bear some fruit, racial discrimination will have disappeared from Rwanda" (10). The second also involves the two of them. Wilson asks Rupert to tell his family that he (i.e. Wilson) is taking refuge at Christophe Safari's place, after the interahamwe start searching for him. Here, Bazambanza frames himself as empathising with the Rwangas (36-38). I argue that this narrative style binds Bazambanza, the Rwanga family, and all Tutsi into a collective group of Tutsis who feel threatened by the interahamwe. It also lends more credence to the author's assertions that he "was in hiding with [the Rwangas]" (i) at the time of the 1994 massacres, and that their story is his story.

Within Rwanda's narrative history, then, texts such as Bazambanza's play an especially prominent role in excavating the racial and ethnic tensions that have existed in the country since the colonial times. These tensions coalesce around what Appadurai describes as

"predatory identities" (discussed earlier in Chapter One). Notably, the postcolony itself nurtures these predatory identities; in essence, the formation of the nation is based on ethnicity and racial identity, which breed untold violence in turn. As Appadurai notes:

> The formation of an ethnos into a modern nation often provides the basis for the emergence of predatory identities, identities that claim to require the extinction of another collectivity for their own survival. Predatory identities are almost always majoritarian identities. That is, they are based on claims about, and on behalf of, a threatened majority. In fact, in many instances, they are claims about cultural majorities that seek to be exclusively and exhaustively linked with the identity of the nation…. The discourse of these mobilized majorities often has within it the idea that it could be itself turned into a minority unless another minority disappears…. Thus, predatory identities arise in those circumstances in which majorities and minorities can plausibly be seen as being in danger of trading places (*Fear* 51-51)

In such a climate, artists sometimes assume a politicised role to narrate their history, especially when that history is full of painful memories. I explore how Bazambanza assumes this politicised role in the closing stages of this section. My point for now is to show that the author draws from Rwanda's ethnic registers to narrate how the idea of the nation is constructed around ethnicity in Rwanda and how the Tutsi minority is portrayed as being persecuted by the Hutu majority within this project of nation formation.

The memoir's narrative progression depends on Bazambanza's ability to juxtapose captions, word balloons and visual images in panels that draw from history, oral memory and sheer creativity to show and tell what happened during the 1994 genocide. From the start, Bazambanza assumes the journalistic role of an insider in hiding with the Rwangas while recording what the Tutsi suffered at the hands of the interahamwe. The opening sentence of the memoir spotlights the historical atrocity: genocide. It also speaks to the memoir's central concerns: that the author sets out to recount how "one million [Tutsis were] slaughtered" during this genocide while "[t]hose who could have stopped the horror did nothing, seemingly indifferent to the drama" (1). I consider this statement to be the author's critique of the failure of the international community in solving Rwanda's internecine conflicts because Bazambanza arraigns the latter for doing "nothing against the country's systematic racial discrimination" (1). Here, the international community is associated with indifference and lack of agency. Rwanda, on the other hand, is (racially) defined by invisibility, poverty and helplessness: "Rwanda, it was often said, is too small, too poor, and too black to elicit compassion" (1). Furthermore, the identities of the victimiser and victimised are presented as

fixed in order to maintain what Adam Jones describes as "a crude moral dichotomy around the Hutu-Tutsi divide (Hutu = bad/ genocidal/perpetrators; Tutsi = good/ victim/rescuers)" (131; slashes and parentheses in original). Bazambanza speaks with great passion both about the imprint the 1994 genocide left on his mind and about the flight of the Tutsi from Rwanda which, he believes, "was like [in] the Titanic" where "everyone wanted to leave the boat, but had no way of doing so" (Marinos par. 5).

Following from this, the very shape of the world the memoir brings into being is inextricably intertwined with cyclical patterns of violence that seem to befall not only the Tutsi but anyone who strays into Rwanda. We get this sense right from the first page of the memoir, with a panel depicting tourists admiring "the country's natural beauty and its mountain gorillas" (1). Behind the floral and faunal vista, however, something darkly and ominous hangs above the land the visitors flock to. The panel warns us that Dian Fossey, one of the tourists who visited Rwanda, "died in mysterious circumstances on December 26, 1985" (1). It further states that "Zigiranyirazo Protais, brother-in-law to President [Juvénal] Habyarimana, is believed to have been involved in her murder" (1). This revelation introduces a sense of foreboding and imminent danger, which comes to pass nine years later. Two characteristics of the journey chronotope are introduced here, which sustain its plot. First, there is the movement of tourists and/or foreigners[12] from different parts of the world to Rwanda, which reflects the journey motif. Then there is the historical movement (of bodies) where thousands of Tutsis are presented either as fleeing one part of Rwanda to another or being "forced to remain in exile, despite their repeated pleas to return to the land of their ancestors" (1). Here, my point coheres with that of Silva who also notes that "Rupert situates the 1994 genocide among past Tutsi massacres, reinforcing through written actions the cyclical pattern of violence that existed against the former Tutsi minority, and occasionally illustrating the symptoms that led to the slaughter in 1994" ("Graphic" 14-15). In all his evocations of violence in Rwanda during and before the 1994 genocide, Bazambanza seems to blame the Hutu.

[12] I loosely use the words "tourists" and "foreigners" here to refer to people like Dian Fossey, American zoologist, primatologist, and anthropologist who dedicated most of her life studying gorillas. Part of her research took her to the mountain forests of Rwanda, where she met her untimely death as revealed in Bazambanza's memoir.

Indeed, *Smile Through the Tears* seeks to show that the Tutsi have been through a lot of tough times. Bazambanza deploys an omniscient narration style characterised by authorial supplements of historical facts to support his argument. What is notable in the narrative is the synecdochic manner in which the Rwangas are emblematic of all Tutsis. This is exemplified in a panel where we see Charles Rwanga telling fellow rescapés[13] at the Centre d'Études des Langues Africaines (CELA) thus: "I've had it with always starting over, *always running*! We fled in '59, in '60, in '61, '62 and '73. Now its 1994 and *the same thing's starting again*. It's too much to bear!" (43; my emphases). Charles' use of the plural "we" here is not in reference to the Rwangas but to a collective Tutsi experience of suffering. In a panel that specifically refers to the 1959 Hutu revolution,[14] Bazambanza further notes that the revolution "was an all-out Tutsi massacre" in which "many survivors fled the country" (8), that with it "Tutsi blood began to flow throughout the country" (7), and that "after 1959, Tutsi became the scapegoats for any political unrests, and were killed at the slightest provocation" (8). The expression "survivors fled the country" calls to mind the metaphor of flight – used here to connote escape from danger. The sentence could also be seen as speaking to the collective unconscious of the Tutsi, which is presented as being haunted by bad memories. Overall, there is an interlinking of space and time here, as seen from Bazambanza's reference to *then* or past historical time (signalled by '59, in '60, in '61, '62 and '73) and *now* or the present ("now it's 1994") through which we see the Rwangas "always running." I, therefore, propose that the Rwangas represent the Tutsi nation in miniature in the memoir, and that Bazambanza makes further reference to history and the metaphor of flight as narrative lenses through which the trauma of the Tutsi is expressed.

The memoir reveals a number of narratorial voices and styles, all of which accentuate the journey chronotope. This shifting narrative technique is a product of the spatial and temporal

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[13] The French word *rescapé* is often used in Rwanda today as a translation of the Kinyarwanda words *uwarokotse* ("one who escapes a catastrophe") or *Uwacitse kw'icumu* ("the one who escaped the spear"). While the words *rescapé* and *survivor* are sometimes used interchangeably, the truth of the matter is that *rescapé* is not synonymous with *survivant* (or survivor). Taylor Krauss has in fact pointed out that "although [many Rwandans] 'escaped' catastrophe, they may not have 'survived.' Alternatively, it might also be said that many of these individuals 'survived' but some have not 'escaped'" ("In the Ghost Forest" 108 [note 1]; See also High "Smile Through the Tears" 224 [note 3]). The point Krauss seems to make here – and which I adopt in this thesis – is that in many ways those who have been through catastrophic events may remain traumatised for the rest of their lives. I consider the Rwangas (and all Rwandans) as rescapés/rescapées in that context since it is difficult for one to tell if they have really come out of the traumatising human experiences.

[14] What is commonly known as the 1959 Revolution was a *putsch* orchestrated by a group of disaffected Hutu who claimed that they were being ill-treated by the Tutsi monarchs. It led to thousands of Tutsi fleeing Rwanda for neighbouring countries.

identities through which the author narrates the attempted extermination of the Tutsi. From a temporal dimension, Bazambanza places the Rwangas as a family that had been in existence since the beginning of Tutsi massacres. For instance, Charles and Rose are framed praying to God to "please, spare our children from a tragedy like the one we knew in 1959" (3). In *In Search of Rwanda's Génocidaires: French Justice and the Lost Decades* (2014), David Whitehouse gives further evidence that the Rwangas are as old as the persecutions themselves. Rose Rwanga, according to Whitehouse, "was born Rose Murorunkwere in eastern Rwanda in 1947" (*Search* 22). She "married Charles Rwanga, a punch card operator, in 1968" (*Search* 22). Whitehouse further notes that Charles and Rose had three children: "Wilson was born in 1970. He was followed by a younger brother, Degroot, in 1972, and a daughter, Hyacinthe, in 1974" (*Search* 22). Whitehouse's observations are confirmed in the memoir, where we learn that Charles was "a typewriter repairman" (3). We also learn that the birth of Hyacinthe reawakens the bad memories in Rose, who tells her husband that Hyacinthe "looks like [her] older sister who was killed in 1959" (3). This information further shows that the horrific events that the Rwangas endure in the memoir and which cause them to be *always running*, have a historical dimension to them. It is this history that forms the backstory in the memoir, and which contributes to the full understanding of how the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi took place.

Apart from extending the myth-making paradigm, historical time is also used in *Smile Through the Tears* to register the author-cum-Rwanga family's memories and emotions, at times turning them into a judgemental register through which we see all Hutus as "the archetypal bad guys" and Tutsis as "the perennial good guys" (Lemarchand, "Bearing" 99), and vice versa. The memoir is inundated with a lot of hate speeches from both sides of the Hutu and the Tutsi. In their reference to the Tutsi, for example, the Hutu are portrayed as thinking that the Tutsi are "dirty" (9), "vermin" (9), "a fifth column" (14),[15] "traitors" (16) and "cockroaches" (18), among other derogatory names. Likewise, the Hutu are depicted by the Tutsi to be an "accursed" group (25), blamed for anything bad that happens in Rwanda (39). They are also referred to as a bunch of "madmen" bent on destroying the Tutsi (36), "hounds" (37), "beasts" (44) and "monsters" (45). Later, when the forces of the RPF take

[15] "A fifth column" is any group of people who undermine a larger group from within. This term is also extended to organised actions by military personnel. By calling Tutsi as "a fifth column," Bazambanza is again tapping into history to refer to, among other things, the Tutsi "rebels" who, after fleeing Rwanda during the 1959 Hutu Revolution, regrouped to reclaim their lost glory.

over Kigali signalling the end of the Hutu-led massacres, Bazambanza portrays the last remnants of the fleeing Hutu as "criminals in power" who had gone "on a rampage and destruction to ensure that nothing remained for the new government" and that "even the gorillas … were destroyed to prevent their being a source of income" (61). In essence, Bazambanza must have learned about these hate speeches from history and public memory, and the memoir reveals how they work.

Broadly then, the memoir reflects two categories of chronotopes of the journey. On the one hand there is the physical, historically time-bound, outwardly manifested journey through which 'encounters' between the Hutu and the Tutsi generate movements of bodies both within Rwanda and across the country's geographical borders. In this physical encounter, the Hutu are portrayed as the bad guys, often wielding machetes, clubs and blunt objects, ready to use them on the hapless Tutsi. On the other hand, there is the mental and/or psychological escape of the petrified Tutsi who are depicted as possessing bad memories of their assailants. This pain is mostly portrayed through Rose Rwanga who makes constant references to the tragedy she knew in 1959 and how she lost her family members in that tragedy. This becomes the epitome through which we see the Tutsi longing for a safe and sound place where they will live without being persecuted by their Hutu compatriots.

As is the case with all forms of cultural production that bear witness to events that are catastrophic in nature, Bazambanza's text turns us to fundamental questions about the function of art and aesthetics (as well as to related questions about whether or not his Tutsi background might have influenced and interfered with his choice of perspective or played a role in the arguments and discussions contained in the memoir). As Glover asks, "does Bazambanza's victimization qualify him with unique insight into the social machinery that set the genocide in motion?" (108) or does it make him susceptible to presenting a biased account of the issues? Glover suggests that both counts do. He further notes, for example, that the memoir "asserts a rhetoric of … 'ethnic amnesia'" (109) through which "ethnic discrimination and human rights abuses [are presented] as the sole property of Hutu extremism, despite the well-documented massacres and civilian casualties that tarnish the record of the RPF" (131-32). Glover further suggests that

> despite his direct experience of the trauma he narrates, [Bazambanza] engages in a mode of commemorative appropriation, wherein the Rwandan genocide becomes the

> sequel of the Hutu Revolution and, in turn, Rwandan history becomes a Manichean narrative of 'good Tutsi' versus 'bad Hutu.' (132)

Michael Chaney seems to stand on the side of Glover in his condemnation of the memoir. Chaney opines that Bazambanza's memoir feeds into a Manichean tapestry in which Tutsis are presented as the victims while the Hutu are the perpetrators. In Chaney's view, the text "indulges in rhetorical strategies that clearly display an ideological bias" ("Animal" 94). He adds that "despite its insistence that it bears an authentic historical record of the genocide, ... the memoir's primary function [is] iconographic hagiography" ("Animal" 94). Reinforcing Chaney's point, René Lemarchand construes *Smile Through the Tears* to be "a comic-strip type story of good and evil" ("Review" 143). Further problematic questions regarding the graphic memoir relate to the question of form and content. As already pointed out, the memoir conflates history, oral memory and lived experience to construct a single-story narrative of the Rwandan genocide. Such an approach is, in many cases, bound to be contested, trashed or even dismissed as unbalanced. In the context of contestations surrounding what is (not) a correct re/presentation of enabling post-genocide memories in Rwanda, it is perhaps acceptable to go along with the above-cited observations that the memoir is too predictive, less objective, still steeped in the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, and, finally, that Bazambanza's project is less helpful in uniting all Rwandans.

As in all complex matters, Glover, Chaney and Lemarchand are both right and wrong. They are right in that it is not enough to simply buy into the single-story narrative because it has its own dangers, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would have us know.[16] However, the three critics are wrong to insinuate that Bazambanza's narrative fails to "give serious thought to a revisionist history of the carnage, one that gives sustained attention to the other side of the story" (Lemarchand, "Review" 143). In my view, Bazambanza's memoir should be treated as a text where the author ably documents personal pain and suffering and that of his fellow persecutees from his own pain-experiences. Such an undertaking would have been different if he were called upon to tell the same story from the perspective of those he considers to be his persecutors. Perhaps this is what also leads Steven High to observe that most scholars who

[16] Adichie highlights "the dangers of a single story," arguing that it becomes impossible for one to see the Other as anything else but what he/she has been re/presented. More crucially, "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." For details, see Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story." Youtube.com. July 2009. At 12:59-13:13.

have reacted to Bazambanza's narrative fail to "sufficiently consider the context: that Rupert is himself a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and that this is his personalized response to the tragedy" (*Oral* 186). High further reaffirms that "*Smile Through the Tears* should be read as *a subjective first-person account*, rather than a comprehensive history" (*Oral* 186; my emphasis), and that the memoir "hints at some of the political tensions and contradictions of the current historical moment" (*Oral* 186). Only then, High maintains, will readers appreciate the fact that Bazambanza's memoir "reveals truth as he sees it." (*Oral* 186)

What High is signalling to here is that within Rwanda's genocidal context, first-hand experiences of the genocide prompt the survivor-cum-narrator to push everyone else's story aside in preference of their own as they recount the atrocities they may have suffered. In such a scenario, it becomes imperative to agree with Zoe Norridge's observation that "the person in pain perceives the world through the lens of their own suffering" and that "such primacy of the personal is reflected in the literary representations of individuals suffering during the genocide[s] in Rwanda" (164). Norridge could well be echoing the views of Jean-François Lyotard, who also argues that in any setting that involves analysis of an injustice there will always be particular facts that will remain unexpressed and inexpressible by the one who is motivated to address and resolve the problem. He calls this "the différend," a case in which "the 'regulation' of the conflict […] is done in the idiom of one of the parties while *the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom*" (*Différend* 9; my emphasis). The point that Norridge and Lyotard seem to make here is that the survivor's painful lived experience can sometimes cloud his/her judgement to the extent that they begin to think that their story is the only story. Thus in order to make sense of how the Tutsi faced a near-total annihilation at the hands of the interahamwe, Bazambanza constructs a "Tutsi-centric narration of Rwandan history" (Glover 125). It seems inevitable to me, then, that however well-disposed Bazambanza is to tell his story from public memory and as he witnesses it, he runs the risk of becoming an unwitting accomplice to the single-story narrative. In the concluding section to this chapter I return to Bazambanza's graphic memoir, specifically looking at how the text advances the truth-and-reconciliation mode of writing.

2.3. Paranoia and Dissociative Fugue: Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise*

Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise* has a certain resonance with *Smile Through the Tears* as it also focuses on the 1994 carnage to present a "Tutsi-centric narration of Rwandan history." The memoir is an account of the fear and hardships that seventeen-year-old Bébé

Leah – as Chishugi was fondly called by those who knew her – suffered during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Chishugi recounts that soon after the President's plane was brought down[17] Rwanda was thrown into "a terrifying orgy of death"[18] where Hutu extremists murdered anyone who had a trace of Tutsi blood in them, or sympathised with the Tutsi. Chishugi's observations resonate with Christian Scherrer, who also suggests that Rwanda was "a country gone mad" (265-266) once the genocide had started in 1994, and that the genocide itself "was first and foremost a state-sponsored mass murder aimed at the annihilation of a national minority on Rwandan territory" which was "carried out with a level of mass participation by the majority population the like of which has never been seen before" (*Genocide* 1).[19]

Having grown up "in a state of more or less happiness" (1), Chishugi says that she was largely unaware of undercurrents of bad feelings towards Tutsi from Hutu until she started going to school in eastern Zaïre, where her family had relocated to when she was two years old. It is in eastern Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) where she noticed the resentment towards her (and fellow Tutsi) through the "horrible songs" some "Zairian" (sic) children sang about them. The contents of one such song: "*Banya Rwanda bote barudiye kwabe* – Go back to your country Rwanda" (14), would make young Chishugi cry at being derided because she was a foreigner. In other words, their habitus as Rwandan immigrants in eastern Congo is a source of the natives' disaffection.[20] After this incident and the many others that were soon to follow, one of her big sisters tried to widen and flatten her nose with

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[17] The real cause of the President's death is shrouded in controversy. Those who are pro-Tutsi claim that Habyarimana's plane was brought down by suspected Hutu hardliners who were not happy that the President was about to implement the 1991 Arusha Peace Accords which would grant the Tutsi a share of the national cake, while those who are pro-Hutu insist that the attack was planned and successfully executed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a movement of Tutsi exiles fighting against the authority of Habyarimana. There is also a third claim that seems to suggest that the Belgian contingent of UNAMIR as well as the French secret service were involved in the downing of the plane. For further details on the contending views about President Habyarimana's assassination, see Lemarchand *The Dynamics* 86; Herman and Peterson *The Politics of Genocide* 54; Kisangani 198 (note 4); Prunier *The Rwanda Crisis* 213-29; Umutesi *Surviving* 46, "Is Reconciliation" 157; and Reyntjens "Constructing the Truth" 23.

[18] Leah Chishugi, *A Long Way from Paradise: Surviving the Rwandan Genocide* (Virago, 2010), p. 57. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[19] Scherrer is probably exaggerating his observations here, as there are other atrocities in history that were committed before the Rwandan genocide. The Armenian genocide, the Second World War massacres, and the killings in (then) Bosnia and Herzegovina are some of these atrocities.

[20] The chants from "Zairian children" and the general disaffection from the local population should be understood in the context of the age-old anti-Rwandan protests by the local inhabitants. According to Filip Reyntjens and René Lemarchand, "Eastern Congo has a long history of anti-Rwandan sentiment going back to the years immediately following independence when Kinyarwanda-speaking elements were viewed with mounting hostility by local Congolese politicians." Rwandese "Hutu and Tutsi were objects of equal distrust by self-styled 'native Congolese,' being lumped together as they were into a single 'Banyarwanda' (or 'Rwandophone') entity." ("Mass Murder in Eastern Congo" 21)

fingers, saying, "I don't want you to be bullied at school because you have such a Tutsi nose, Bébé" (14). Chishugi further notes that sometimes she and her siblings would sleep with plugs of cotton wool up their nostrils in the hope of widening their noses. Chishugi and her sibling seem to think about their childhood experiences through a post-genocide lens, which destabilises them and make them connote an anti-Tutsi xenophobia as opposed to an anti-Rwandese xenophobia (see also Tembo, "Paranoia" 74-5).

Chishugi here draws on the colonial archive of racial stratification, what Mahmood Mamdani calls "a distinctive colonial legacy [of] *race-branding*, that was reproduced as a revolutionary legacy of *race-as-nation*" ("Race" 21; original emphasis). As already alluded to, the Belgians are claimed[21] to have undertaken an exhaustive census to determine who was a Hutu and who was a Tutsi in Rwanda. Physical features were the foundation on which the issuance of identity cards was based. In the words of Carol Off, "to ensure that everyone was registered correctly, the Belgians took to measuring craniums and nose lengths to determine 'racial' class" (*Lion* 14). Those with flat noses were condemned to be Hutu, while those with pointed noses were thought to be Tutsi. In wanting to widen and flatten their noses, therefore, Chishugi and her siblings express the desire of identifying with Hutu to escape the taunts and persecutions Tutsis were subjected to on account of their perceived physical features. In making this extremely personal confession, the author offers the reader a rare glimpse into the racial and ethnic dynamics that are at play in the Great Lakes, which would soon explode into a violence that haunts some countries in the region today. (Tembo "Paranoia" 74-5)

In typical narratives containing the road chronotope, "the protagonist undertakes a journey, in which the distance travelled typically stands in stable relation to the amount of time elapsed" (Hansen 19). Chishugi's memoir explicitly evokes the road chronotope through the author-

[21] I use the word 'claim' advisedly here, in light of Mahmood Mamdani's rejoinder to the theory that seems to suggest that it is Belgian colonialism that invented Tutsi privilege in Rwanda. In "Race and Ethnicity as Political Identities in the African Context" (2004), Mamdani dismisses such a position as baseless. In his view, even before the colonial enterprise, it was possible for prosperous Hutu to shed their Hutuness and become Tutsi through a process called *Kwihutura* ("Race" 15), just as it was possible for "an impoverished Tutsi family [to lose] its status' through a process called *Gucupira* ("Race" 16). Mamdani maintains that

> Belgian colonialism did not invent Tutsi privilege. There was Tutsi privilege before colonialism. So what was new with Belgian colonialism? Not Tutsi privilege, but the justification for it. For the first time in the history of Rwanda, the terms *Hutu* and *Tutsi* came to identify two groups, one branded indigenous, the other exalted as alien. For the first time, Tutsi privilege claimed to be the privilege of an alien group, a group identified as Hamitic, as racially alien. Only with Belgian colonialism did Hutu become indigenous and Tutsi alien, the degradation of the Hut a native degradation and Tutsi privilege an alien privilege. ("Race" 16)

narrator's references to her personal experiences as she fled the interahamwe. In the book, Chishugi narrates how she and her six-month old baby miraculously survived the carnage, relying on her presence of mind and, partly, her "modelling work and the fact that [she] was known and liked in Hutu circles" (27) as she negotiated her way through the numerous makeshift road blocks and hostile interahamwe militias. A number of moderate Hutus – Josephine (52-56), Luc (63-68), Manu (80-84), Bahati (87-90), and Habi (93-98) – are portrayed as risking their lives to get her out of harm's way as she flees Kigali for Goma[22] in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 184 kilometres away. This show of goodwill and generosity is also extended to her by non-Rwandans – Mustapha (112-127), Kamal (132-134), John (158-165, 181-187), Piri (166-177), a Mozambican family (187-189), Shei (189-192), Sarah (197-198), Beverley (199-205), and Pastor Levi and Aunty Mary (207-211) – in her continued flight from Goma to the United Kingdom, via Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa.

Bakhtin argues that the chronotope of the road is often associated with the motif of encounters: "The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road …, the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (*Dialogic* 243). The motif of encounter in Chishugi's memoir is largely reflected through the "random encounters" between the author and her compatriots in her continued flight from Rwanda to other parts of Eastern and southern Africa. As Chishugi physically flees the conflict hot spots, we notice that her problem is also psychological and that her physical flight from Rwanda is often paralleled by a metaphorical inner journey, where the "choice of a real itinerary equals the choice of 'the path of life'" (*Dialogic* 120). Following Judith Herman's division of symptoms of trauma, it can be argued that in the memoir, Chishugi experiences "intrusion" (*Trauma* 35), the belated relieving of traumatic events, as well as "constriction" (*Trauma* 35), where she feels powerless and paranoid about everyone from, or close to, Rwanda, as I discuss in detail later. Of the latter, Richard McNally notes that "intrusive recollections are

[22] As already pointed out, Chishugi grew up in (then) eastern Zaïre where her parents had relocated to when she was only two years old. Since her family was originally from Rwanda it was easy for them to keep moving to and from Rwanda, a point confirmed by Howard French who notes that as "provinces … situated along Congo's eastern border, … North and South Kivu have, since the precolonial era, been subject to large waves of migration by people from Rwanda, including both Hutu and Tutsi" ("Kagame's War" par. 3). At age 17 Chishugi permanently moved to Kigali to work as a model, and was caught up in the crossfire of the horrific conflict. This also explains why she is fleeing to Goma in (then) eastern Zaïre which, to her, is her other home.

disturbing thoughts and images of the event that come to mind even when the person does not want to think about it" (*Remembering* 105). For Chishugi the "disturbing thoughts and images" she remembers about the genocide are all the bad incidents that the Hutu inflicted on her (and her ethnic group).

In *Perceiving Pain in African Literature*, Norridge observes that "literature published in the decade following the genocide in Rwanda is characterised by … fear and horror" (149). Norridge is of the view that those whose lives were threatened during the genocide are dogged by fear while horror follows those who visit the genocide sites after the event. In a similar vein, Chishugi's episodic memories of past personal experiences of the genocide make her, for some time, decide against meeting any of her compatriots again for fear that such an encounter might reopen the seemingly healing wounds. She recounts:

> I had developed an almost pathological fear of anyone from Rwanda, and decided that the only way I could stay safe was by keeping well away from people from my country…. Who knew when the Interahamwe might rise up again and finish off those of us they missed last time? (221)

Following Chishugi's earlier statement that when the genocidal killings were underway in Rwanda in 1994 "kind friends turned into cold-blooded killers" (63) and "Hutu fathers murdered their Tutsi wives and children" (57), there is further evidence that the interahamwe are on a killing spree, determined to "finish off those of us missed last time" (221). The violence in the text is thus effected by the interahamwe, described as people who were determined to do everything possible to exterminate the Tutsi. Such statements tap into stereotypical registers that used to claim, according to Rupert Bazambanza, that "no living Hutu is innocent of genocide" (*Smile* 62; Tembo, "Paranoia" 75), and which seem to be the node around which the politics of memory are patterned in the contemporary Rwandan state. The problematics of this approach are discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter.

A central feature of *A Long Way from Paradise* is thus the author's relationship with her compatriots both within and outside Rwanda, especially after the killings begin on the evening of 6 April 1994. Chishugi can never admit to herself that her paranoia is not a product of hatred, and that she is only "overwhelmed with the guilt of surviving the genocide" (247). Instead, she begins to see anything that was once close to her as "flimsy and fragile" (227), including Christian, the father of her child. As she reports: "Who do you trust

when you have seen men who you have known for many years as good husbands and fathers killing their wives?" (227). This dramatic embodiment of dissociation, with its associative post-traumatic stress disorders, engages what Jacqueline Maingard suggests is humanity's "empathetic alignment with the horror of [another person's] experience" ("Foreword" xxiv). As readers, we begin to understand that what Chishugi went through must have been so shattering that she begins to imagine the world she lives in as a panoptic space where, to echo Michel Foucault, "inspection functions ceaselessly" and "the gaze is alert everywhere" (*Discipline* 195) to monitor her. Like the Foucauldian prison subject, Chishugi begins to think that she is being watched. This feeling of being under constant surveillance coupled with her suspicion that after the killings started she trusted no one because "Hutu had killed the people [she] loved and nearly killed [her] too" (110), shakes her confidence and heightens her paranoia towards everyone around her. (Tembo, "Paranoia" 76)

Chishugi's "pathological fear of anyone from Rwanda" and her decision to physically keep well away from them (221) recalls the American Psychiatric Association's conceptualisation of "Dissociative Fugue" as one of the means of dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the American Psychiatric Association observes that Dissociative Fugue "is *characterized by sudden, unexpected travel away from home* or one's customary place of work, accompanied by an inability to recall one's past and confusion about personal identity or the assumption of a new identity" (477; my emphasis). An underlying temptation with "Dissociative Fugue" is the trope of travelling, or the journey. The traumatised individual may find it very difficult to stay in one place and might resort to (physical) movement as a way of dealing with his or her psychogenic state. According to the American Psychiatric Association, travelling for an individual suffering from Dissociative Fugue "may range from brief trips over relatively short periods of time (i.e., hours or days) to complex, usually unobtrusive wandering over long time periods (e.g., weeks or months), with some individuals reportedly crossing numerous national borders and travelling thousands of miles." (482; parentheses in original). In *A Long Way from Paradise*, Dissociative Fugue is both physical and psychological, and both are as a result of the disturbing thoughts and images of the carnage the author-narrator witnessed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Even after she no longer lives in Rwanda, memories and nightmares of the genocide long gone still return for a long time, and disrupt Chishugi's daily life and make her feel insecure

in the new homes where she lives. This is understandable, given Dori Laub's argument that "the traumatic event, although real, [takes] place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after" ("Bearing" 69). For example, Chishugi discovers that even when she is living in Cape Town, she constantly thinks that it is not safe to meet people from Rwanda and the neighbouring countries:

> As the months passed more Burundians, Rwandise and Zairians arrived in Cape Town. Their presence made me feel nervous. Feeling unsafe once again made me despair. I had been so sure that South Africa would be a country where I could settle and thrive. Gradually it dawned on me that I wasn't going to feel safe anywhere in Africa. In fact even the word 'Africa' was beginning to make me feel uneasy. (230-231)

In this passage the author-narrator establishes a connection between her uneasiness and the presence of more people from or close to her homeland streaming into Cape Town by pointing out that it is these people who were responsible for the death of her family members, and for her *persona non-grata* status. The picture becomes clear to us as readers when we discover that the author-narrator has expanded her frame of reference to dread not only the Hutu from Rwanda but also "Burundians" and "Zairians" as contributing to her feeling of insecurity. At this point, the traumatic event that forced her to leave her homeland still shocks her, and impacts upon her. Similarly, the distinction between the events that pushed the author-narrator out of her homeland and the trauma of "surviving the Rwandan genocide" (as the sub-title of her memoir reads) is put to test, underlying her belief that she "wasn't going to feel safe anywhere in Africa" (231). The trauma she experienced puts her on her guard, making her show "hyperarousal" symptoms. In Judith Herman's view, "hyperarousal" is "the first cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder" in which the traumatised person goes "onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return any moment" (*Trauma* 35). Chishugi's distrust and "vigilance for the return of danger" (Herman 35) are not unfounded, given the fact that something harrowing *does* happen to her while she is recuperating in Cape Town when, in a case of mistaken identity, she is "grabbed from behind" and "bundled into a car boot" by armed thugs (231-234). This frightening and distressing episode shreds the last hopes she had about staying in (South) Africa and drives her (family) away to England. But, try as she might in her land of sojourn, she is not able to put the dark ghost of her past behind her, for even when she arrives in Europe, she is still cynical. This cynicism is re-ignited one day when she finds a group of "older, white boys" punching her son (246). She recounts:

> I had taken my eyes off my child for just a couple of minutes and he was beaten up. The sight of so much blood reminded me of the genocide. *My fragile healing process had been smashed to pieces*. … Once again *I had the familiar urge to pack up and leave the place where I no longer felt safe*.
> I hated people I didn't know and became over-protective of everyone I loved. *When I laughed or smiled there was no genuine emotion underneath, just a dark, gaping emptiness*. (247; my emphases)

This passage is striking in the attention it draws to the stubborn persistence of insecurity everywhere she goes. The current threat to Chishugi and her son's peace might be predicated on racist notions, questions of social acceptance and rejection, and aggressive behaviour that could be traumatic for anyone, but that might be considerably worse for Chishugi, a "chronically traumatised person [who is] hypervigilant, anxious and agitated without ever feeling calm or comfortable" (Lewis 18). Chishugi's situation is even more perplexing when we consider the fact that ever since she left Rwanda, she has been trying to forget the past trauma – by, among other things, running away from ongoing traumatising circumstances – as one way of coping with her suffering and loss. This, however, is problematic since, McNally reminds us, "traumatic events – those experienced as overwhelmingly terrifying at the time of their occurrence – are highly memorable and seldom, if ever, forgotten" ("Debunking" 821). Within the context I have chosen to use McNally's thoughts, in applying them to Chishugi's memoir and the Rwandan situation, what we see is that the author-narrator – symptomatic of the post-genocide Rwandan state – is inevitably locked in a traumatic time warp, which prevents her from seeing even those things that are not related to the genocide she has witnessed as normal and reversible. (Tembo "Paranoia" 77-8)

Chishugi's inability to feel safe because of the emotionally wrenching episodes that keep returning to her anywhere she goes or lives recalls Derrida's notion of the inevitability of haunting in *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1994). In real life situations, the spectre conjures images of a reincarnation of something dark and ominous; of something that "has disappeared [but] appears still to be there" (*Spectres* 97). Such a ghostly presence reflects "confirmation of a haunting" (*Spectres* 37). Although Derrida is addressing the totalising force of communism in Europe, the image of the spectre allows us as readers to think critically about the presence of unsettling scenes in and around people who have been exposed to horrific conditions in their past. Based on its haunting nature, the spectre could be related to the scar or a mark left on a person's body

tissue. The scar in real life situations has the characteristic of a thing that stubbornly looks back at us, its freckled spots and strange presence telling us that a perfect skin once stood in its place before a laceration happened. This resonates with Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma as "the repeated infliction of a wound," a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (*Unclaimed* 3), or something which "imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (*Unclaimed* 4). Just like the indelible scar, I argue that the "overwhelmingly terrifying" scenes and events that confront Chishugi will not go away unless she faces them head on. (Tembo, "Paranoia" 78)

The discourse of Rwandan binary politics most commonly available to readers is that the Rwandan genocide was what Christian Scherrer calls "a state-sponsored mass murder aimed at the annihilation of a national minority on Rwandan territory" which was "carried out with a level of mass participation by the majority population the like of which has never been seen before" (*Genocide* 1). While, as I have shown, there are strong reasons to believe that many Hutus "turned *interahamwe*,"[23] some writers such as Aimable Twagilimana suggest that the number of Hutus involved in the genocide may have been smaller than Scherrer's assertions. Regardless of the proportion of Hutus who were either involved or complicit, what is important for our understanding of Chishugi's memoir is Twagilimana's suggestion that it was "a small group of people" within the Hutu population who "created a plan grounded in the flawed Rwandan historiography to set the majority Hutu against the minority Tutsi (and the Hutu who opposed the scheme)" (*Debris* xvii-xviii; parentheses in original). Despite the many Hutus that Chishugi describes risking their lives to save hers in the memoir, her anger at the Hutu militia and their bosses is so great that one may speculate that it influences her decision, at one point when she thinks she is finally out of danger, to sever whatever ties she

[23] I borrow this expression from Luke Fletcher. In "Turning Interahamwe: Individual and Community Choices in the Rwandan Genocide" (2007), Fletcher observes that while it is important to acknowledge that militia groups during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda were largely Hutu in formation, it may not necessarily be true to say that these people were only youths. It is, in fact, possible to advance the view that they were a mixture of the young and the old, as well as professionals and amateurs. Fletcher thus suggests that during the genocide in Rwanda most Hutus "turned interahamwe." For him, "to be an interahamwe meant either to be a killer or to be in league with the killers." Fletcher further observes that the "make-up of the interahamwe included large numbers of ordinary civilians or villagers from local or surrounding communes who had come from neighbouring hills to take part in the massacre" ("Turning Interahamwe" 39). The fact that a lot of people have pointed out that when the genocide was underway Hutu fathers murdered their Tutsi wives and children and betrayed their Tutsi neighbours, serves to show that most people "turned interahamwe" to save their skins. The reasons for participation in the genocide were equally diverse: intimidation, political opportunism, material interest, virulent hatred of the Tutsi, fear of Tutsi retaliation, ambition, cowardice, a wish to avoid fines for nonparticipation in the killings, the fight for resources, unquestioning obedience to authority, and youth extremism.

has had with her Hutu friends out of the belief that they had all turned interahamwe. One such Hutu friend at the receiving end of her complex decision is Josephine, who had helped her when the killings first started. It is Josephine who had given her shelter and, later, arranged that she, her six-month old son, and a few Tutsi friends be sneaked out of the house to the safety of Chez Lando (55-66). But when the two finally meet outside Rwanda, in Goma, Chishugi cannot sit at table with a Hutu. And so she abandons her once bosom friend:

> As I walked away from her I realised that I had turned her offer down because I wasn't ready to sit down with a Hutu, even though Josephine was my friend.... I was starting to believe the Interahamwe propaganda: I was a Tutsi cockroach who did not deserve to sit with someone like Josephine. My self-esteem was in shreds. (110)

The importance of this statement lies in the author's recognition of what Glover terms "the animalization of the genocide victim" in Rwanda (107). "By appropriating and inverting the colonial race hierarchy that privileged Tutsi over Hutu, Hutu extremism … animalized Tutsi, favouring the insect imagery of a cockroach infestation" (Glover 108). The admission made by Chishugi – "I was a Tutsi cockroach who did not deserve to sit with someone like Josephine" – thus indicates not only her assimilation of the ethnic stereotypes but also her open admittance to succumbing to the animalised status the Hutu had reduced her (ethnic group) to in order to justify their heinous acts. I make two contentions in assessing Chishugi's (re)actions here. First, I suggest that she is sarcastic in her focus on the animal trope as her way of expressing indignation at the failings of the (then) Rwandan society. Second, Chishugi seems to be mobilising the animal rhetoric to support her inability to process the idea of a friendly Hutu. In other words, underneath her actions lies a simmering anger that she holds against all Hutus including those who were on her side.

Granting that the ire and angst conveyed by the author-narrator towards her Hutu compatriots is so great, readers may begin to consider that what she has gone through may never be erased from memory. In such a scenario, the effects of experiencing trauma are transmitted within and across generations, and subsequent generations will be forced to talk about past events as if they only happened yesterday, as if they are happening to them in the present. The manner in which Chishugi frames the Hutu, and what they did to her (family) sixteen years after the genocide (*A Long Way from Paradise* was first published in 2010) clearly demonstrates that – for much of the time described in the narrative – she is still haunted by bad memories, instead of pushing them to the back of her memory. This kind of fixation

reflects the larger Rwandan population today where it appears that there is a sense of collective feeling of distrust among both the Hutu and the Tutsi (see Tembo "Paranoia" 80). Unless addressed, such feelings could serve as a catalyst for more atrocities.

2.4. Writing Mass Suffering: Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*

> We are often asked, as if our past conferred a prophetic ability upon us, whether Auschwitz will return: whether, that is, other slaughters will take place, unilateral, systematic, mechanized, willed, at a governmental level, perpetrated upon innocent and defenceless populations and legitimized by the doctrine of contempt. – Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*

Writing in the mid-80s, Primo Levi – the Italian Jewish chemist, writer, and holocaust survivor – could only ask whether the world was finally a safe place to live in or whether another form of evil was still lurking in the background. Levi had survived the Nazi holocaust, described by Elie Wiesel as a tragedy that has no response. Little did he know that barely a decade after the publication of his book another human massacre would erupt in Rwanda. This carnage, as we have seen, was the 1994 genocide, which was immediately followed by suspected RPF-led pogroms of fleeing Hutu (presumed to have participated in the killing of the Tutsi during the genocide). Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* is a macabre tale of these latter persecutions, mainly focussing on her experiences (and those of fellow Hutus) between October 1996 and September 1997. Integral to the narrative structure of Umutesi's book are the seemingly random but premeditated massacres that ebbed and flowed in waves in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. According to Howard French, "as Kagame installed a minority Tutsi regime in Rwanda, some two million Hutu refugees fled to UN-run camps, mostly in Congo's North and South Kivu provinces. These provinces … are situated along Congo's eastern border with Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi" ("Kagame's War" par. 3), where they were nevertheless pursued and mercilessly massacred by Kagame's Ugandan-backed RPF soldiers.

Umutesi, a trained sociologist, was working with rural women's cooperatives before Hutu militias and the advancing RPF soldiers descended on her Byumba prefecture in northern Rwanda and rendered her homeless in 1994. The memoir chronicles the two years of Umutesi's "forced, chaotic, and harrowing trek with hundreds of thousands of other refugees from their native Rwanda into Zaïre" (Songolo 108) in which she walked for more than 2000 kilometres, passing through Zaïre's tropical rainforest and surviving through the crowded

camps and squalid living conditions as a refugee. "They are on a trek that seemingly has no end, heading for a destination unknown to them, with only a glimmer of hope that the sun of peace will rise once again" (Habimana 104). Emizet Kisangani adds that "in their journey across Congo, the Hutu refugees had almost no knowledge of where they were heading, except away from their attackers, whom they recognised as being Tutsi, their countrymen" ("Massacre" 179). Umutesi's account – subtitled *The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaïre* – is only one of the many survivor stories that are still coming out of Rwanda following the 1994 genocide.[24] Ultimately, her 'ordeal' is a pointer to the "other slaughters … perpetrated upon innocent and defenceless populations and legitimized by the doctrine of contempt" that Levi points to in the epigraph above.

Picking up and reading Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* immediately makes one think that "[t]he former Tutsi victims of violence have replaced the former Hutu perpetrators of violence with the same goal in mind: eliminate the other group by excluding it from power" (Kisangani 197; see also Reyntjens and Lemarchand 21). From the very beginning, the reader is confronted with one disturbing question: was the massacre of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo a case of genocide, or was it just a mad rush of disorderly elements acting upon orders from the psychopaths they served to inflict pain on defenceless citizens? In the light of the understanding of the term *genocide* given by Raphael Lemkin at the beginning of this chapter, Kisangani argues that "the killing of the Hutu refugees was a calculated and premeditated course of action, which started in eastern Congo and continued to the western part where refugees crossed the border" and that "such [killings] qualify as genocide" (181). Similar sentiments are also shared by Songolo who observes that during the massacre of Hutu refugees in (then) Zaïre, "acts whose intent cannot be characterized as anything other than genocidal were perpetrated" (112; see also Jones 134-139). Umutesi explores this contested issue in her memoir, contributing to an intimate and personal narrative of what Songolo suspects to be "the other Rwanda genocide" that followed the 1994 massacres. By focussing on this period, Umutesi sheds more light on the refugee situation in the Great Lakes region

[24] I am aware of the existence of Pierre-Claver Ndacyayisenga's *Dying to Live: A Rwandan Family's Five Year Flight Across the Congo*, another heart-wrenching tale of what the book's blurb calls "an exodus, on foot, over thousands of kilometres, of wretchedly abandoned refugees, denied water and food, robbed, bombed, raped, exploited by so-called liberators, reduced to slavery, and forced to cross dangerous rivers by their own means, hide in the snake and animal-infested jungle, with their faith as their only source of shelter and comfort." I make occasional references to this book only where it helps illuminate my analysis of *Surviving the Slaughter*. Otherwise I do not intend to make Ndacyayisenga's text part of the discussion in this section.

and the persecutions that saw millions of Rwandans either internally displaced or flee to neighbouring countries, and over 230,000 refugees unaccounted for.[25] Susan Thomson, in *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda* (2013), finds Umutesi's work as "particularly powerful, as her story is representative of the lived experiences of hundreds of thousands of individuals who fled the genocide in Rwanda only to find themselves trapped in crowded, unsafe refugee camps" (21). In Thomson's view, *Surviving the Slaughter* "is an important antidote to the simplified historical narratives of Tutsi as the only legitimate 'survivors.'" Thomson maintains that the text "provides a more complex version of reality, showing the multiple and fluctuating constraints that shaped individuals' options for survival," that the "account also shows the folly of analysts new to the region who rely on stereotypical generalizations about ethnic conflict and simplified accounts that seek to explain the genocide in the language of atavistic ethnic enmity" (21).

It would be easy for the reader to picture Umutesi's account as "lending a voice to the voiceless" (Habimana) or speaking "on behalf of ordinary people" (de Lame). In which case, *Surviving the Slaughter* should be read as a witness narrative that engages with the parrhesiastic practice of truth-telling through which we see her write the anxieties of genocide memories in Rwanda. In *Fearless Speech*, a collection of six lectures given at the University of California at Berkeley between October and November 1983, Michel Foucault proposes four constitutive elements that characterise the notion of truth speaking. Foucault calls this "parrhesia." Drawing on the classic texts of Greek drama, Foucault suggests that "parrhesia" involves telling the truth in risky situations and doing it as one's duty as a citizen to criticise power. Foucault proposes four constitutive elements of what he calls the parrhesiastic act: first, "parrhesia" is speaking or telling the truth; second, "parrhesia" entails having the courage to speak the truth in situations where there is a risk or danger for the truth teller. This danger "always comes from the fact that the said truth is always capable of hurting or angering [those in power]" (17); third, "parrhesia" is "a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor" or those in power; (17-18) and, finally, "parrhesia" is a duty and is further related to freedom (see also Tembo "Writing"

[25] Marie Béatrice Umutesi, *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaïre*. Trans. Julia Emerson (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 155. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. See also Emizet Kisangani who projects the number of Rwandan refugees massacred in (then) Zaïre at around 233,000. (179)

420). If we apply these ideas to Umutesi's narrative, it can be observed that the author is speaking truth to power. Inasmuch as Umutesi does this, by taking up pen and paper "to testify in the name of all the men and women who did not have [her] luck and who died in Hell" (5), the book also seems to be concerned with the question of how the author reconciles with her traumatised past; about how much longer, as a traumatised person, she will endure the loss of family, friends and acquaintances; and what new skin she will need to wear in a Rwanda (and the Great Lakes region) whose leadership might begin to think that it has been exposed by her to the outside world.

Of the three texts covered in this chapter, Umutesi's stands out as a narrative that captures in greater detail what Norridge calls "mass suffering of whole populations" (*Perceiving* 135). This suffering happens, as expected, on the road, and is not limited to Rwandans alone.[26] Cyprian Fisiy particularly observes that after the 1994 genocide "thousands of refugees were sent streaming across the [then] Zaïre border when the R.P.F. took over the capital city, Kigali" ("Of Journeys" 21), while Songolo speaks of "the exodus, massacre, and dispersion of so many Hutu refugees" ("Marie" 108). Fisiy and Songolo's statements go deep into the heart of the argument of this chapter, exploring the extenuating circumstances that saw ordinary Rwandans (read Hutu) journeying into the unknown. In the memoir, this takes the shape of dangerous negotiations around (then) Zaïre's equatorial rainforest as well as through countless refugee camps. *Surviving the Slaughter*, then, reflects the fugitive mobility of large groups of people. This is explicitly evoked in the original French title of the book, *Fuir ou mourir au Zaïre*, which means *To Flee or to Die in Zaïre*. In choosing to title her book this way, Umutesi appropriates and resignifies images of movement or flight, which seem to be part and parcel of Rwanda's history. A similar understanding can be derived from the current English title of the book, which harks back to survival from an impending slaughter, by fleeing from the source of danger. The title is thus a true reflection of what the reader finds between the book's covers, where we learn that tens of thousands of Hutu refugees not only fled Rwanda but also died "from 'rebel' guns, hunger, disease, accident, exhaustion, despair, and sometimes from natural causes" (Songolo 108; Lemarchand, "Bearing" 94).

[26] In *Dying to Live*, Pierre-Claver Ndacyayisenga points out, for example, that "[Hutu and Tutsi] refugees were not the only victims of this sad chapter of our history" but also "all the Zaïreans who were killed for helping [the fleeing refugees]" and "all the local people who happened to live on [the refugees'] path through Zaïre and whose fields [the refugees] ravaged and whose homes [they] looted." (166)

In its re-examination of the violence that informed the Rwandan postcolony and which led to thousands of deaths and forced many into exile, the narration of *Surviving the Slaughter* moves through both spatial and temporal planes. In temporal terms, Umutesi provides a much clearer background to the ethnic essentialism and the events that led to past Tutsi persecutions, which are then linked to how it was inevitable for the Hutu to have a free rein with the assassination of President Habyarimana in April 1994, just as it was impossible for them not to flee Rwanda after the RPF took over in July 1994. For Dominick LaCapra, the effect of this temporal blurring is that "the past not only interacts with, but erupts into, the present, and at times the present seems to be only a function of, or a diaphanous screen for, the past" (*History* 153). In other words, Umutesi seems to suggest that there is what Erin McGlothlin describes as "the implication of the past into the present and vice versa" ("No Time" 179). I thus argue that Umutesi's portrayal of past atrocities functions as a means of making sense of what has happened in Rwanda between *then* and *now*, and that time and space in the memoir are sites of shifting identity through which the mass suffering of both Tutsi and Hutu ought to be examined.

Violence and suffering are crucial to the affect of Umutesi's narrative: a product of the invisible genocide or backlash against Hutu refugees in eastern Zaïre after the victory of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front.[27] Contrary to President Kagame's assertions that "there was no mass revenge in the post [1994] genocide period" ("Preface" xxiii), Umutesi takes recourse to (re)writing mass suffering as a metaphor through which she chronicles what Lemarchand calls the scenes of apocalypse that happened between October 1996 and September 1997 when "hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees lost their lives" in eastern Zaïre ("Bearing" 94). Indeed, death, dying, helplessness and impossible mourning' often accompany the apocalyptic scenes that pervade the memoir, as captured in the description of a dying sixteen-year-old girl below:

> The third day after leaving Tingi-Tingi we began to pass the bodies of the dead and dying. When someone was too sick to keep on walking, he sat down by the side of the road and waited for death. The first and last time I had dared to look at one of these unfortunates, my eyes fell on a teenager hardly sixteen years old. Like the others, she

[27] I am aware of the spirited defence against RPF actions in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. President Paul Kagame has charged, for example, that the accusation that after 1994 the RPF embarked on a revenge mission against the génocidaires and that it sought to "exterminate the Hutu population […] is an absolute falsehood, sheer nonsense." Such statements, Kagame maintains, are "morally bankrupt and an insult to all Rwandans, especially survivors of the genocide." ("Preface" xxiii)

> was lying at the side of the road, her large eyes open. She watched, without seeing them, her companions in misery who abandoned her without giving her any help and who didn't wait for her to die before giving her a coffin. Her clothes were wrapped modestly around her, but I couldn't help noticing that they were soiled with the excrement that she could no longer hold back. A cloud of flies swarmed around her. Ants and other forest insects crawled around her mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. They began to devour her before she had taken her last breath. The death rattle that from time to time escaped her lips showed that she was not yet dead. *All who passed by glanced at her and then took up their conversation where they had left off*. (165-66; my emphasis)

In this passage, Umutesi recounts death and dying of fellow stragglers as they "journey towards nothingness," in Primo Levi's words (*If This* 8). Besides showing the dilemmas and unforgettable traumas of Hutu fugitives in eastern Congo, her descriptions could be interpreted as suggesting that the refugees had developed psychological defences against the systematic and indiscriminate massacres they witnessed as they fled their attackers, by pretending to be less concerned with what they saw on the road. This supports what Sigmund Freud calls repression to describe the way emotionally painful events could be blocked out of conscious awareness so that their painful effects would not have to be experienced *in the present*. The note of unconcealed indifference in the passage, therefore, could be due to the author's realisation that what had just happened to her partners in adversity could have happened to her. More crucially, the description holds the implicit acknowledgement to the reader that Umutesi could not properly mourn fellow rescapés because of the enormity of the suffering refugees experienced. In this sense, Umutesi could be said to work in the same vein as Holocaust survivors who faked normalcy as a way of coping with the loss of fellow persecutees, while they looked forward to seeing another day.

Connected to repression, there is also an implicit unrepresentability figured in the dearth of post-genocide witness narratives from Rwandan rescapés of both the interahamwe and the RPF-led bloodbaths. Such paucity reflects how dislocated the individual or community is after experiencing a horrific event, which is then accompanied by an inability to mourn or speak of the trauma either orally or in writing. Drawing on Freud, Caruth argues that "trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (*Unclaimed* 11). That is to say, trauma is a sudden breach in a person's life which destroys his/her feeling of a sense of protection and makes him/her to be hypervigilant. There is also a large consensus that describes trauma as something that lies

outside the range of comprehensibility and articulation. Trauma is thought to evade language because it occurs "outside the parameters of 'normal' reality… outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery" (Laub 69), and, therefore, the victim of trauma "is *robbed of a language* with which to articulate his or her victimization" (Felman, 125, emphasis in original). Umutesi seems to be aware of what Caruth calls a traumatic event's "essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding" (*Trauma* 154). Yet she is determined "to testify in the name of all the men and women who did not have [her] luck and who died in Hell" (5). Such a commitment to speak out is instrumental in not only reconstructing her shattered self but also in articulating the plight of fellow rescapés who have largely been unable to speak about the horrors they witnessed. The urge to testify on behalf of all those who suffered involves Umutesi in the role of "a dual witness to trauma," understood by Michelle Lynn Brown as someone who is "both observer of the trauma (the witness who *sees* what happens) and as a testimony of it (the witness who *speaks about* what happens) (12; original emphases and parentheses).

One scholar who has written extensively on Rwanda and the Great Lakes region, and who argues that what is remembered and what is not remembered in the region is a political choice is René Lemarchand. In *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory* (2011), the author presides over a remarkable study whose essays consider the pattern of genocide denialism, obfuscation, myth-making and revisionism by which most genocides fade into oblivion. Lemarchand premises his book on the fact that "all genocides have their deniers" ("Preface" viii), and that this is due to deliberate efforts at concealing the truth by those who hold power which relegates certain horrific events to the background of social and political memory (Tembo, "Writing" 424). The events surrounding retributive killings in Rwanda and eastern Congo are no exception. When Rwanda descended into an orgy of violence in 1994, the international community stood on the sidelines, choosing instead to focus its attention on the historic democratic elections in South Africa and, later, the FIFA world cup in the United States. Again, when Hutu refugees were being persecuted and killed in (then) eastern Zaïre, "the government, politicians, and army of the host state, Zaïre, played a fundamental role by aiding and abetting the genocidaires" under the full glare of "Western states and the United Nations Security Council [which] chose not to stop it" (Adelman 96)

The reasons why Rwanda's carnage found little resonance outside its borders are not farfetched. They have ranged from denial that genocide was being committed to the

parsimonious principle of non-involvement in an operation that was bound to lead to more casualties for the West. In between these seemingly flimsy excuses, one is likely to find the blame-the-natives narrative, like the one offered by James McKinley Jr. In "Searching in Vain for Rwanda's Moral High Ground" (1997), McKinley Jr speculates that the disturbing passivity of the West during the Rwandan genocide is not because there was no one willing to help, thereby paving the way that could have stopped the senseless killings, but rather because "the historical roots of the conflict are tangled and fed with blood" (par. 6). This, in his view, "yields incredible difficulty in trying to think through what might be done to help this tortured region stop the killing" (par. 6). The impetus to act on the carnage in Rwanda is not only swept under the carpet by McKinley Jr here; he also insinuates that African societies are historically bestial, with the hands of the warring factions not being clean. Rwanda, for him, is a case in point, where it became incredibly difficult for the West to stop the killings. This moral high ground is a construct on which Umutesi probably bases her accusations, that most Western countries and international humanitarian organisations denied that there was genocide in Rwanda.

Given such flagrant aspects, it is hardly surprising that Umutesi should pick on them in her portrayal of the West and the humanitarian community as not only being silent when Rwandans needed them most but also as contributing to the horror, helplessness and massacres of both the Tutsi and the Hutu in Rwanda and the neighbouring countries after the 1994 genocide. For example, she records incidents where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was seen encouraging locals in eastern Zaïre to turn in fleeing Hutu refugees for them to be forcibly repatriated back to Rwanda, instead of the international body coming to the aid of the obviously suffering refugees (207-212). Umutesi records that "starting in June 1997, the UNHCR embarked on a forced repatriation programme of Hutu refugees" (208). She maintains that sometimes the UNHCR "initiated a system of paid compensation for any Zairian who brought [Rwandan refugees] in. The bounty was ten American dollars for each refugee" (211; see also Ndacyayisenga 80, 96).

It should be noted that by forcing the refugees to leave eastern Zaïre and go back to Rwanda, the UNHCR was in contravention of article 33(1) of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees which states:

> No Contracting state shall expel or return a person … in any manner whatsoever to or across the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or for other political reasons, including political offences which he has or is alleged to have committed (qtd. in Grahl-Madsen 32).

More crucially, by making the refugees go back to a place that did not guarantee their safety the UNHCR became an unwitting accomplice to the genocide. This explains why Umutesi portrays the international community as being oblivious to the suffering of ordinary Rwandans, choosing, instead, to "let [them] wander [to their deaths] in the [equatorial] forest like wild beasts" (165). It also explains why she "wrote an article on the complicity of the UNHCR in the adoption of the coercive measures that were impacting the refugees" (101; see also Tembo, "Writing" 424-25).

I read the figure of the Janus-faced nature of the international community as an exemplary personification of equivocation. My suggestion here is that the UNHCR is presented in the memoir as both helper and culprit. Crucially indeed, it is both at the same time. It is enlisted by Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke as bearing a "moral and a legal responsibility to assist and protect refugees" ("Preface" xvii). Yet, as Adelman and Suhrke maintain, "in the face of the fears of the refugees about returning, and the intimidation by the militants who also fostered those fears, the UNHCR was unable to facilitate significant repatriation" ("Preface" xvii). In terms of Umutesi's vision of the UNHCR, presumably, this double-faced nature could be interpreted as evidence that the humanitarian community lacked a clear sense of direction and commitment to deal with the refugee crisis in the region. Umutesi uses this as a basis to question the seriousness of the West and human rights groups in Rwanda's – and the Great Lakes Region's – domestic issues. She asks:

> Where was the international community that talked about human rights but withdrew when they should have prevented the genocide of the Tutsi by the Hutu militias and when they should have condemned the massacres of the Hutu by the RPF? Where was this international community that had applauded the destruction of camps in eastern Zaïre, which abandoned us once again and let us wander in the forest like wild beasts and which allowed this young girl of sixteen to collapse on the road like a dog, food for the ants of the equatorial forest? (165)

In Umutesi's questions we see the anger of someone who feels let down by those she thought would help condemn, or even stop, the massacres at the different periods they occurred in

Rwanda's history. What she sees instead is an international body that does the opposite of what is ethically expected of it (Tembo, "Writing" 425-26). This is what prompts Habimana to observe that *Surviving the Slaughter* refracts the UNHCR's actions in Zaïre as pursuing a policy that was akin to "a dangerous obsession that cast doubt over the organization's commitment to its most basic principles, such as the principle of voluntary repatriation and the principle of nonrepression" (105). By posing these questions, Umutesi implicitly answers them: that "the international community had betrayed first the Tutsis during the genocide, and then us [Hutus], as we fled through the Congo" ("Forgotten" par. 48), and that there was what Gérard Prunier terms "an unspoken compact among the various Western actors not to prevent the Rwandese from carrying out their revenge [against each other] since it was the West's lack of reaction during the genocide that had made it possible in the first place" (*Africa's* 147). Prunier's suspicion is that "the RPF calculated that guilt, ineptitude, and the hope that things would work out would cause the West to literally let them get away with murder" (*Africa's* 23, see also Tembo, "Writing" 426).

As I have said elsewhere ("Writing" 422), what Umutesi raises in her memoir speaks to the crisis of the post-genocide Rwandan state, which, I argue, is the central theme in the memoir. The contemporary Rwandan state has a lot of genocide deniers and revisionists. *Surviving the Slaughter* emphasises the metaphorical implications of genocide denialism by drawing attention to the one-sided view of the Rwandan genocide; that, for example, "the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi was the only genocide to be recognized both at the political and judicial levels" and that "it is an established fact that the victims of genocide were the Tutsi" (Kagame xxii-xxiii, xxiv). Early on in the book, Umutesi toys with this revisionist agenda, especially the RPF-led government's insistence on what Israel Charny, in a different context, reads as "the uniqueness of its own people's genocide, and consequent devaluing or delegitimization of another people's genocide" ("Innocent" 21). Where Bazambanza and Chishugi portray the 1994 genocide as a Hutu campaign aimed at exterminating the Tutsi, Umutesi's narrative chooses to condemn both sides of the perpetrators of violence in Rwanda. For example, she points out that during the Rwandan civil war of 1990-94 both "Hutu and Tutsi fled together … from the [interahamwe] militias and the [RPF] rebels" (50), thereby insinuating that what happened to the Tutsi also happened to the Hutu. This is what makes Umutesi counsel fellow Rwandans to be vigilant in what they say, as "there are not simply victims on one side (Tutsi) and guilty (Hutu) on the other as we have been led to believe" (73; parentheses in original).

In an interview with Felix Holmgren, Umutesi follows up on her ideas, maintaining that "all Hutus did not participate in the genocide [just as] all Tutsis are not victims. Hutus as well as Tutsis committed crimes against humanity" ("Forgotten" par. 32). Umutesi also reflects on both past and present atrocities in Rwanda to ask the all-important question: "What crime had all of these [Tutsi and Hutu] victims committed to deserve such a death?" (166). The implication here is that only a balanced engagement with extant issues would lead to a fair representation of the genocide in Rwanda and its violent aftermath in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the process, Umutesi's text resists, interrogates, disrupts, challenges and deconstructs the claim of genocide in Rwanda and "considers [not only] the executions of moderate Hutu, [but also] the series of genocides before and after [1994], as part of the same historical process" that led to the 1994 genocide (Hinton et al 2).

Of course, none of Umutesi's observations suggests that she dismisses Rwanda's national reconciliation paradigm. Instead, I would suggest that her book works to question the extent to which such a discourse is all-inclusive and, also, counters the routine overemphasis on Tutsi victimhood and Hutu culpability that the current leadership seems to champion at the expense of the other massacres in and around Rwanda. In my opinion, *Surviving the Slaughter* works to demonstrate that it is this one-sided approach that (has) pushed Rwanda and most parts of the Great Lakes region into the culture of violence and suspicion, and which increases tensions in Rwanda today. Seen from this perspective, we could say that Umutesi's narrative is consistent in its condemnation of both sides of the perpetrators of violence in Rwanda. The narrative also suggests that both the interahamwe militia and the RPF should be held responsible for the suffering of thousands of ordinary civilians, just as both ethnic groups should be given an enabling environment to mourn their losses equally. (Tembo, "Writing" 426-27)

2.5. Conclusion: 'Working Through' Rwanda's Traumatic Memories

> All this reconciliation and the confessions – that's the program of the state. And when a killer comes and asks your pardon you can't do anything else. You pardon him, but you don't really know if it comes from your heart, because you don't really know about the killer – if he is asking forgiveness from his heart – Evariste, a Tutsi survivor

Throughout this chapter, I have examined the strategies that the three authors adopt to narrate their experiences in Rwanda. I have particularly shown how being exposed to fearful states and experiences creates in the survivors a sudden, unexpected urge to flee away from home or the source of danger to a (perceived) safe place. As the narratives progress, however, we notice that the author-narrators realise that the only way they (and members of their ethnic groups) can become whole again is by embracing and possessing their tarumatised past, with all its attendant problems. This moral lesson is particularly reflected in the closing stages of *A Long Way from Paradise* and *Smile Through the Tears*. In this concluding section, I explore how the truth-and-reconciliation discourse is reproduced in the writing of these memoirs.

In *A Long Way from Paradise*, Chishugi is told by her mother to face her demons and exorcise them from herself when she finally reunites with her after six years of separation. Maman, her mother, knows the power of forgiveness and reconciliation when she tells her daughter to learn to trust again by "revers[ing] these negative thoughts" (267) she has had about the Hutu and "remember[ing] the good people" (267) in her life. Maman further counsels: "Yes, people did terrible things during the genocide, but think also of the good ones…. You have to love everyone, Hutu and Tutsi" (267). Generally, forgiveness is often associated with approaching one's offenders rather than avoiding them. Therefore Maman tells her daughter to approach the people who had wronged her and her family. Humbled by this gesture of love from her mother, Chishugi goes to see one of her family's killers, now in prison in Kigali. Her initial reason for wanting to see the man is that she wants closure: "I did not particularly want to come face to face with my sisters' and Sans Souci's killers, but *I was desperate to heal*" (267; my emphasis). When she finally meets the killer, however, she feels she may not heal completely unless she forgives him unconditionally:

> I forgive you. ... You are a human being but you were not a human being then. I don't hate you for what you did. I hate those who gave the orders, the politicians who organised the genocide. They were not brainwashed the way you and so many others were. They understood exactly what they were doing. (270)

Granted, Chishugi's choice of words here could be interpreted in psychoanalytic terms as a form of transference in which she directs her hatred not at the person who allegedly killed her family members but at an ideological body ("those who gave the orders, the politicians who organised the genocide" [270]). I nevertheless propose that Chishugi plays on the term forgiveness here not just because she wants to heal, but also to suggest that only by so doing

will she and the post-genocide Rwandan state move on, and dismantle the age-old hatred myth through which Hutu and Tutsi have often perceived each other in recent times. Her own work demonstrates that such misperceptions can be overcome. For instance, she begins to expunge the bad memories she has had about the Hutu when she opens to the killer:

> I never believed all that stuff about hatred between Hutus and Tutsis. I never hated Hutus and I'm sure you never hated Tutsis. *You and I are just two ordinary human beings who wished nothing bad to happen to anyone else. Both of us were victims of evil meddlers*. Once again I say I forgive you. Now you must try to make peace with yourself. (270; emphasis added)

Thus while huge chunks of the memoir lambaste the interahamwe for what they did to the author (and her ethnic group), what we get from the closing passages of the book shows that the author-narrator has a forgiving heart, one that only wished for peace to all Rwandans regardless of their ethnic orientation. The principal benefit of this hopeful and promissory ending of the memoir is that the author recognises the need for all Rwandans to embrace their traumatic past if they are to move on and effectively integrate into a new Rwanda. (see also Tembo, "Paranoia" 81-82)

Echoes of the same reconciliation paradigm gain prominence in Bazambanza's memoir. After the forces of the RPF-Inkotanyi take over Kigali, Bazambanza portrays a scene involving Canisius: a moderate Hutu who had once warned the Rwangas to flee for their lives when the killings were underway, and who "was always against Rwandans being judged along ethnic lines" (62). But when he is mistaken for spying on Madame Rose (61), a passing-by Tutsi invokes Hutu culpability on him. This results from the Tutsi man's perception that "no living Hutu is innocent of the genocide" and that "[t]hose who didn't kill [Tutsis] were informers" (62). Contrary to the enraged man's expectations however, Rose restrains him, counselling:

> Haven't you ever wondered what would happen if all the survivors of the genocide allowed themselves to be led by their anger? Another genocide, that's what! Is that what you want? Is that your legacy to future generations? ... It would be a shame if such a disaster hadn't even taught us one lesson that we could put to use in rebuilding the country .... And to me the lesson is this: none of us has the right to take the law into our own hands. We must let justice take its course. After all, impunity is what made the genocide possible in the first place.... All of Rwanda's ethnic groups must strive to understand each other if we want to live together. As a wise man once said: You can live together like intelligent creatures, or die together like fools. It's diversity that makes life so interesting. (62)

The reference to survivors not being led by anger in the new Rwanda because this would only succeed in creating "another genocide" and that all Rwandans "must strive to understand each other if [they] want to live together" clearly echoes the still-elusive messages of national unity and reconstruction that several scholars (discussed in detail below) have written on. The panel that contains this dialogue also demonstrates that genuine reconciliation must begin with victims and victimisers coming together to bury whatever differences may have existed between them. This symbolic gesture of reconciliation is represented in another panel where Rose invites Canisius "to a small reception at [her] house" in remembrance of her "loved ones and the beautiful moments [she] shared" with them whilst they were living (62). Such a gesture coming from a woman who has lost all her family members reflects the survivors' ability to lay Rwanda's dark ghost and look to the future with renewed hope. This is also what Larsen means in her observation that "through the example of Rose Rwanga, the memoir "successfully teaches [the international] community about racial harmony" so that readers should learn not only "about the causes of the genocide" but also "avoid these dangerous behaviours and encourage [them] to take preventative action instead of remaining bystanders to human rights abuse." ("Identification" 159)

Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter* does not so much describe reconciliation in the manner and style that Bazambanza and Chishugi do. Reconciliation in the memoir only makes sense within the larger project of "scriptotherapy," defined by Suzette Henke as a form of writing that denotes "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (*Shattered* xii). Umutesi makes this her objective when she says: "*I made a habit of writing* so that people would know and break their silence, but also *to stop my own pain*" (78; emphases added). The other reason that motivates Umutesi to write is for us, the readers, to know that her book "stand[s] as a monument in memory of those who perished" and that writing for her "was an act of personal defiance against death" (Songolo 109), besides "giv[ing] voice to a collective defiance against those who would seek to erase the memory of the Hutu victims" (Songolo 109). The last reason for taking up the pen, is "to raise her voice in protest against the international community's callous treatment of Hutu refugees" (Songolo 110). In the same line of research as Songolo's, Norridge equates the function of literature to that of the talking cure. In Norridge's view, "Umutesi sees the action of writing as one of solidarity with everyone who has suffered" (*Perceiving* 145). She "experiences an urgent need to record the lives and suffering of those who are still alive [in order] to effectuate change" (*Perceiving* 145). Here, then, lies Umutesi's reconciliation drive.

She writes to lend a voice to the gross human rights abuses she and fellow refugees have suffered, not only for the world to know what happened but also to make those responsible to come out and acknowledge their mistakes. She hopes that by so doing, they will embrace and possess the past in a process that will make them heal and change for the better. I thus propose that in using her writing to help bring unity to the seemingly fractured Rwandan community, Umutesi's memoir reflects María Pía Lara's notion of the illocutionary power of literature. As Lara asserts, literary works are "emancipatory narratives [that] create new forms of power [and] configure new ways to fight back against past and present injustices" (*Moral* 5). Literature, for Lara, then, becomes a deliberate and purposeful performative act of searching for a "new beginning." Lara illustrates this by using the example of storytelling, noting that "storytelling becomes the articulate social weaving of memories, the recovery of the fragments of the past, the exercise of collective judgment, the duty to go against the grain and promote with this retelling, a performative frame for a 'new beginning'" (*Moral* 40). Writing is, therefore, seen as a complex mode of communicating difference, alternative subjectivities and distinct identity re(constructions) in the creation of a new public.

In all these episodes, we note that the three authors use writing to heal and reconcile with the people who caused them and their ethnic groups great suffering. In "Salman Rushdie/*Joseph Anton*: Deconstruction of the Fatwa Mirror" (2015), Benaouda Lebdai clarifies and explains this point in the following terms: "writing on … a disturbing experience can heal deep wounds, can help the victim to move on in life and give such a [text] a literary and political assignment" (4). This process recalls historian Dominick LaCapra's conceptualisation of "working through" as a means of dealing with horrific events. In working through trauma, LaCapra (after Sigmund Freud) suggests, the traumatised person is "able to distinguish between past and present and recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future" (*Writing* 22; parentheses in original). This includes "mourning and modes of critical thought and practice" (*Writing* 22). LaCapra points out that in the process of working through, one tries to represent the trauma in a way that doesn't ever transcend it, but counteracts, re-enacts or acts out (*Writing* 42). At the individual and group levels, working through "requires going back to problems, working them over, and perhaps transforming the understanding of them" (*Writing* 148). What LaCapra seems to say here is that it is possible for individuals and communities to participate in "possible mourning," understood by Roger Luckhurst as

"remembering to forget – to work through, interiorize, and then pass over" horrific events ("Impossible Mourning" 250).

How do LaCapra's ideations hold out for Rwanda against the issues raised in this chapter? Much as one might expect to find inspiration in the gestures of reconciliation advanced in the chosen texts, we would be served well to heed what several people have said concerning the national commemoration week that takes place every April in Rwanda. Susanne Buckley-Zistel observes, for example, that "the memory of the genocide [during this commemoration period] is not a unifying factor, as disagreement prevails over the clear demarcation of victim and perpetrator" (145). Likewise, Olivier Nyirubugara, Susan Thompson and Claudine Vidal echo Buckley-Zistel in their observations that in the long run the national commemoration discourse does little, if any, to heal and unify all Rwandans. Arguably, Nyirubugara has produced the most extensive critique of what he calls the one-sided "'good-massacres' versus 'bad-massacres' path, which, in the end, [only creates] ethnic supremacy on one hand, and inhibition on the other" (51). Drawing on Jacques Derrida, Nyirubugara warns that the politics of memory that represent "a fraction of the nation, if not a class … is dangerous and makes the future of Rwanda even gloomier" (52). Thomson, on her part, insists upon the policy of national unity and reconciliation in Rwanda as "collaps[ing] the different forms of killing (and the attendant motivations) into a singular representation of genocide as something that happened only to Tutsi. (79-80; parenthesis in original). She dismisses the project as "an ambitious social engineering project" (110) in which the RPF-led government only casts "all Tutsi (whether or not they were in Rwanda during the genocide) as innocent victims or 'survivors' and all Hutu (whether or not they participated in the genocide) as guilty perpetrators (known … as *génocidaires*) and violent killers" (117; parentheses in original). Such a campaign, Thomson fears, only succeeds in creating a climate of social angst and public disaffection, and further constitutes unaddressed trauma. Finally, Vidal sees the enforced annual commemorations of the genocide as "explicitly deny[ing] the status of victims to those Hutus who, even though they did not kill, were massacred so as to create a climate of terror." Vidal wonders how the government "can … speak of reconciliation when the exposure of skeletons has as its only purpose to remind the Tutsi that their own people were killed by Hutu." This, Vidal maintains, "is tantamount to keeping the latter in a permanent position of culpability" (qtd. In Lemarchand, "Genocide" 27).

An equally interesting view on Rwanda's reconciliation project comes from Tutsi survivors themselves. As the epigraph to this section clearly states, Tutsis strongly feel that Rwanda's national reconciliation project is a program of the state and that they forgive the killers because the government asks them to forgive. In "The Life After," a project in which Philip Gourevitch seeks the views of Rwandans on how they are dealing with the reconciliation rhetoric in the wake of the *gacaca*[28] trials, the American author and journalist shares reports of unamused Tutsi respondents telling him that the national reconciliation drive

> … is all theatre…. It doesn't mean anything…. They [i.e. Hutu] only asked [for] pardon because of *gacaca*. Why didn't they ask forgiveness before *gacaca*? It's because of the President that they don't kill. Forgiveness came from a Presidential order. *He's the one who pardoned them*. ("The Life After" par. 28; my emphasis)

In "Performing Reconciliation in Rwanda," Ananda Breed is intrigued with the way "grassroots associations use theatre as a tool to reconstruct communities and identities in post-genocide Rwanda" ("Performing" 507). Breed thinks that these associations "perform reconciliation [by] staging survivors side-by-side [sic] with perpetrators, embodying the national rhetoric of unity and reconciliation" ("Performing" 507). In light of the sentiments raised by both Hutu and Tutsi towards the reconciliation drive I appropriate Breed's essay title and recontextualise it here to point out that far from preaching tolerance, acts of forgiveness, telling the truth and participation as Breed thinks stage theatre does in Rwanda (507), the national reconciliation campaign is a performance staged more to advance a "rhetoric of unity and reconciliation" than an act that genuinely comes from the hearts of both Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. It is reconciliation without truth. The issues described here are not just a matter of scholarly argument but, more importantly, they are related to the path to true reconciliation in Rwanda; about providing an enabling environment for healing the wounds that all Rwandans have suffered over the years. Unless addressed, Rwanda's fragile peace and democracy is built on a false reconciliation forced on both Hutu and Tutsi estranged towards each other.

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[28] The 'political' *gacaca* was a system of outdoor community courts, convened for genocide cases in Rwanda. In the words of Philip Gourevitch, it was designed to reward confessions, because the objective was not only to render rudimentary justice and mete out punishment but also to allow some emotional catharsis by establishing a collective accounting of the truth of the crimes in each place where they were committed. Otherwise *gacaca* is *traditionally* an informal civil dispute resolution process for resolving property, inheritance, personal injury and marital relations claims between families and members. It is closer to mediation than litigation and begins with all parties to a dispute meeting with witnesses and local leadership to discuss the problem. A solution is then proposed by the group. If it is not accepted by the parties, they are at liberty to take their dispute to court. For details, see Timothy Longman, "Justice at the Grassroots?" 209; and Kalekezi et al, *Localizing* 79.

Chapter Three

Liminal Narratives, Adult Betrayals and Child Soldier Traumas

3.1. Introduction

In her study "Literature and the Limits of Human Rights" (2014), Emily Hogg makes an important observation about child soldier narratives: they "draw their particular power and resonance from ideas associated with the condition and experience of childhood but almost all of them are actually written by adults" (85). Hogg further notes that these texts "directly employ the form of Bildungsroman for the purposes of human rights campaigning" (70). Most important of all, they enact recreated memories. Hogg's observations speak to this chapter's interest in the careful way child soldier narratives frame lived experience, betraying a suspicion that the truth/s and memory/ies they advance may have been reconstructed to suit a particular kind of humanitarian discourse. The chapter particularly seeks to explore how China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier: Fighting for My Life* (2002), Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire: One Girl's Extraordinary Journey from Child Soldier to Soul Singer* (2006) and Emmanuel Jal's *War Child: A Boy Soldier's Story* (2010) narrate what I suggest to be the suspended identities of children exposed to and involved in organised hostilities and combat. I examine how this in-between status seems to invite a particular kind of reading of child soldier narratives; one that, following Irina Kyulanova, could be equated to "a deviant rite of passage, which yanks the protagonists out of their childhood status [and] yet fails to grant them the new status of mature adults and integrate them into a stable social structure" (29). I suggest that it is this place of ambiguity and indeterminacy, of anxiety and hope, of no longer belonging to the old and not yet to the new, that distinguishes child soldiers as doubly liminal figures. I also examine how Jal, Keitetsi and Mehari situate their narratives primarily in the domain of the everyday and the family home to depict adult betrayal and parental abuse in pre-war and domestic spaces. Noting, as Bjørn Thomassen does, that liminality "is about how human beings experience and react to change, about how larger groups or entire societies undergo change and transition, how they live through the uncertainties of the in-between, and how they come out on the other side of it – if at all" (*Liminality* 1), I argue that Jal's, Keitetsi's and Mehari's texts challenge us to (re)think and explain the subjectivity of child soldiers with regards to their placement within the societies they return to after they get out of the civil conflicts.

The chapter is structured in three sections, all of which draw on Victor Turner's and Homi Bhabha's concept of "liminality" to suggest a way of looking at child soldier identities as traumatised, fluid, relational and always in flux. The first two sections examine literary representations of parental abuse and adult betrayal of children at home, and as child soldiers in Keitetsi's *Child Soldier* and Mehari's *Heart of Fire*. I anchor these two sections on Sigmund Freud's notions of "the uncanny" and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial reading of the concept, to explore the interface between the abuse of children by family and known adults in pre-war and domestic spaces and their recruitment to war. The last section extends notions of "narcissism of minor differences" (discussed in Chapter Two), to explore depictions of ideological and personal differences between the Dinka and the Nuer in Jal's *War Child*. I argue that these differences lead to deep fissures between the warring sides. In the context of these religious and ethnic fault lines, the identity of a child caught in between becomes doubly liminal as he fails to identify with a place to which he can belong.

I make two contentions in this chapter. First, I submit that although the writers are from (and narrate their experiences in relation to) different countries, their work bears witness to what I consider as a shared experience of postcolonial realities in Eastern Africa: the child soldier phenomenon. Further, these texts serve as examples of how authors write retrospectively to comment both on their relationships with their parents and their experiences on the war front as child soldiers.[29] In such cases, I suggest, their opinions about their fathers are mostly influenced by their experiences on the war front where they were constantly abused by fellow soldiers. This narrative strand is particularly strong in Keitetsi and Mehari's autobiographies, where the author-narrators filter their brutal memories of rape and attempted rape incidents through their tempestuous relationships with their fathers (and not their mothers, who are equally to blame for abandoning them). Nevertheless, I do not create excuses for the fathers' ill-treatment of their children as narrated in the texts. Second, and as I discuss in Chapter One, the authors narrate their lived experiences from reconstructed memories to bear witness

[29] While acknowledging the obvious imperfections and contradictions involving the term, this study's use of "child soldier" is in keeping with the understanding derived from the 1997 "Cape Town Principles and Best Practices" conference organised by UNICEF. Delegates at this symposium agreed that a "child soldier" is not only someone "who is carrying or has carried arms" but "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members." Girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriages during such contexts are also thought to be child soldiers. (UNICEF, "Cape Town Principles" 12)

to events that happened to them over twenty years before they appeared in print. In such a context, one needs to weigh the narratives against what Smith and Watson call "additional features of production and circulation" ("Witness" 595) that creep into witness narratives to 'take care' of allegations of inauthenticity, absences, lacunae, or incoherences in them. While similar issues feature in Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (2007) – the fourth child soldier memoir published by an author from Eastern Africa, to my knowledge – this text is left out of this study because it does not foreground the author's troubled relationship with her parents the way the other three texts do.

3.2. 'Misery Lit,' Katabasis and Traumas of (Non)belonging: Keitetsi's *Child Soldier*

Uganda's history of protracted internal differences goes back to pre-colonial times when the country was divided into a series of indigenous kingdoms and chieftaincies, each of which had its own ruler and leadership system. Some of these kingdoms were Buganda, Bunyoro-Kitara, Toro, Ankole and Busoga. In *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (1976), Mahmood Mamdani suggests that by the time Britain formally declared Uganda its protectorate in 1894, Buganda was the dominant Kingdom. The British started working with the Baganda as their main strategic allies. The Baganda then became the most highly-favoured agents of the British Crown, acting as tax collectors and labour recruiters and trainers, and forcing the Buganda culture on those from other parts of the new Protectorate of Uganda (121). As a result of this colonial policy, the other kingdoms deeply resented the Baganda. It can be argued that the first seeds of internal conflicts were sown during this period. After independence in 1962, Margaret Daymond notes, "Ugandans were subjected to constant power struggles as the newly created nation-state began to fracture along ethnic lines" ("Afterword" 115). Since then, the country has been at the centre of insecurity and protracted internal differences. Between 1962 and 1986, the country changed its leadership nine times,[30] all of them through coups and counter-coups. As Tirop Peter Simatei aptly remarks, "Uganda more than any other country in East Africa has gone through a horrendous phase in her postcolonial history" (*Novel* 133). China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier* and Goretti

[30] These are: Kabaka Edward Mutesa (9 October 1962 – March 1966), Apolo Milton Obote I (March 1966 – January 1971), Idi Amin (25 January 1971 – April 1979), Yusuf Lule (13 April – 19 June 1979), Godfrey Binaisa (June 1979 – May 1980), The Military Council led by Paulo Mwanga (May-December 1980), Apolo Milton Obote II (December 1980 – 27 July 1985), Tito Okello-Lutwa (August 1985 – January 1986) and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (26 January 1986 to date). For details, see Jimmy Tindigarukayo, "Uganda: 1979-85" 607-622; Odoi-Tanga Fredrick, "Politics, Ethnicity and Conflict in Post Independent Acholiland, Uganda" 130-31; and Danson Kahyana, "Negotiating (Trans)national Identities in Ugandan Literature" 122.

Kyomuhendo's *Waiting* (discussed later, in Chapter Five) bear witness to this "horrendous phase" in Uganda's postcolonial history.

Keitetsi is a former child soldier who was involved in Yoweri Museveni's guerrilla war against then Ugandan president, Milton Obote, between 1984 and 1995. Her real name is Shena Asana Gacu, but she was renamed 'China' by an army commander on her first day of military drill, who thought she looked Chinese because of her slanted eyes.[31] *Child Soldier* reflects the story of a child who is at war even before she is conscripted into Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA). A Ugandan of Tutsi origin, Keitetsi's 'troubled childhood' begins in the domestic sphere, where the village chief repeatedly rapes her and then threatens to kill her if she tells anyone about her ordeals (52). She also faces rejection and other forms of regular physical abuse at the hands of her own father, described in the book as someone who "was more like an animal, like a predator, than a human being" (11). She equally hates her stepmother and grandmother for constantly ill-treating her, and she often wishes them ill. This is what drives her out of her home, especially when she learns that the woman she used to call mother was not her biological mother. As she states: "this was the time to stand up for myself, before my stepmother [and my father] destroyed my soul" (88). She decides to take a bus one fine day in 1984, in search for her real mother who "lived at the end of the route" (90). Keitetsi finds her real mother but, growing suspicious of the older woman, she decides to run away (93).[32] Soon afterwards, she falls into the hands of the NRA.

On one level, Keitetsi's story is an example of what several critics including Esther Addley call the 'memoir of crisis' or 'misery lit.' This is a genre that depicts personal suffering in a particular, almost formulaic, pattern. According to Addley, "the standard tale begins in childhood, and almost invariably involves some form of abuse at the hands of a trusted adult,

[31] This is how Keitetsi describes the way she acquired the name China: "The following day we trained in taking cover and charging with bayonets…. On the third day of my training an instructor came straight towards me in the line at the morning parade. The hard-looking and tall man stood in front of me, looking straight down into my eyes, and asked my name. Scared and frightened, I looked down. 'Look at me China eyes!' He roared and my head shot up to meet his eyes. Then he pulled me out of the line and commanded me to march in front of the others. 'China! Left-right, China, Left-right!' From that day I was known as 'China.'" For details see China Keitetsi, *Child Soldier* (Jacana, 2002), p. 96. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[32] I suggest paranoia is the reason for Keitetsi's running away from her biological mother. This paranoia can be explained in two ways. First, it is possible that Keitetsi was not sure that she had found her 'real' mother, given the fact that the said mother had abandoned her while she was still a toddler. The other reason could be that she had grown up distrusting the elders around her (father, stepmother, grandmother, the village chief), given the fact that they always abused her. As I argue in Chapter Two of this study and elsewhere (see Tembo, "Paranoia, 'Chosen Trauma'" 74-81), paranoia is a reflection of one's crisis and breaking points which, in turn, pushes one over the edge and compels him/her to distrust everyone around him/her.

usually a parent. It is frequently written in the first person …, tracing a heartbreaking arc of lost innocence and damage. The tale always ends in some form of escape or redemption" ("So Bad" par. 9). In the narrative world of *Child Soldier*, we see a rich evocation of trauma of the author-narrator, following the abuses she was subjected to both from her parents and her fellow soldiers in the various rebel camps she stays as a child soldier. On another, the memoir is more of an exploration of Keitetsi's fluid – and at times conflicted – identity, of the core experiences and memories that lead her to maintain her *nom de guerre* and use it as her pen name instead of her real name. Dominic LaCapra's understanding of trauma is that it is "a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only through difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered" (*Writing* 41). These "holes in existence" have the potential of making some people who lived through a traumatic experience mask their true identity. I propose that Keitetsi's use of a pseudonym to narrate her experiences reflects a 'disarticulated self' that is trying to process the trauma she must have experienced both at the hands of her parents and those of Museveni's guerrilla forces. Her book describes a sustained and well-choreographed form of trauma; a drift towards suffering with hardly a glimpse of redemption and in which the author has to continuously fight for her life, as the subtitle of her memoir suggests. Thus the memoir reads like a *katabatic* narrative.

In theoretical terms, it is necessary to briefly examine *katabasis* (or *catabasis*) since it is a concept that will form the backbone to this section. *Katabasis* – a term from the Greek *katabainein*, meaning to go down – can be used to describe a "descent of the living into the underworld" (Ogden xxi), or "a Journey of the Dead made by a living person in the flesh who returns to our world to tell the tale" (Clark 32). The concept was first popularised in Greek mythology to refer to the perilous journey to, and expected return from, the Underworld. Since then, scholars have extended the use of the classical *katabasis* to represent the literal and metaphorical journeys of things, events and (fictive) characters in different fields of study as possessing *katabatic* tropes. Erling Holtsmark observes that the appeal of the word *katabasis* seems to apply across genres and "is freed from any kind of anchoring in specific cultural traditions" ("*Katabasis*" 49). The point of *katabasis* is that one returns from a

harrowing experience stronger and wiser than before. The hero always goes down to face his fears and triumphs over them.[33]

The analysis that follows takes its cue in part from this understanding and from the growing body of literary narratives where most *katabatic* motifs are accompanied by the psychological suffering and purification of the protagonist. I suggest that *Child Soldier* is a text that lends itself to a *katabatic* analysis, and that Keitetsi is a katabasist who frames her experiences as a *child* and a *soldier* "within the narrative structure of a descent into Hell and return" (Falconer 7). In her memoir, she describes a world where tenderness and parental love have long given way to cruelty and cynicism, and where madness and violence and despair are the order of the day. This pattern is established right from the start of the memoir, which begins with her father's "madness at home" and the village chief's sexual assaults. It shifts precariously through the infernal experience (in Parts 1 to 4 of the memoir), until Keitetsi decides to find "a way out" of her situation by leaving for "far away from Africa," which is the last chapter of Part 5 of the memoir. Subconsciously, then, examining Keitetsi's memoir under the *katabatic* trope allows us to view her life as floating in-between the child she wishes she could have been and the used, abused and rejected young person she becomes.

Among the many stylistic traits of trauma narratives highlighted by trauma critics, there is usually some mention of use of jagged style, along with the loss of "conventional linear sequence" (Whitehead 6). For Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, rethinking life narratives through the narrative lens of an imprecise and poorly structured style is proof of the author's authenticity. It means, as well, looking at incidents where the "narrative coherence breaks down, in digressions, omissions, gaps, and silences about certain things, in contradiction" (*Reading* 26). Smith and Watson maintain that "[w]hile we may read the narrator's recitation to us as one long, continuous narrative, the text signals discontinuities that will not bear out our own fiction of coherence" (*Reading* 64). As I discuss in the subsequent paragraphs, Keitetsi's narrative invites the reader to detect these breaks, digressions, omissions, gaps, and

[33] These examples notwithstanding, *katabasis* is not always associated with triumph. In "Bouncing Down to the Underworld: Classical *Katabasis* in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*," Rachel Falconer makes useful contrasts between the Dantean and Orphic models of *katabasis*, arguing that in the Dantean model (which is the basis of the examples given above), the hero ends in victory or triumphs over something. In the latter, there is no rebirth for the *katabatic* hero. In the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, for example, the journey that Orpheus makes to the underworld to claim back his dead wife ends in failure (479). In the sense that we fail to locate Keitetsi's rebirth or triumph over her misfortunes within the narrative world of the memoir (apart from the fact that she escapes to Europe), *Child Soldier* is a modern *katabatic* narrative of the Orphic type.

silences, which are severally scattered in the text. The text's extremely fragmented structure also prompts the reader to look for connections: that, for example, what we see in the text is a reflection of Keitetsi's ruthless personality. Of the three authors discussed in this chapter, she is probably the only one who is a perpetrator as well as a victim of trauma but, unlike the other two, shows no sense of shame, guilt, responsibility or self-blame for these acts.

According to Suzette Henke, someone who was once abused by a male member of the family may take to writing to engage "the anxiety and rage against a spectral patriarch who is everywhere and nowhere – whose nefarious deeds are hidden in the recesses of the unconscious, and whose authoritarian presence his daughter can never escape" (*Shattered* 129). In *Child Soldier*, there is a notable emphasis on the author-narrator as shattered by unpleasant experiences, both at the hands of her parents and the horrendous acts from a ragtag guerrilla unit that is "always on the run from the government army" (96). The memoir is replete with scenes and events that point to Keitetsi's descent into Hell and her unbridled rage towards her father. These unpleasant experiences begin with her emotionally cold upbringing at home, where she is constantly mistreated and forced to scavenge on the fringes of her family. This makes her wish death upon her father, grandmother and stepmother and hate herself for being raised in such a home. The situation is so bad for her that when President Milton Obote urges the entire Ugandan population to chase the Tutsis out of Uganda for allegedly supporting Museveni's NRA (51), for example, she has little sympathy towards her parents, themselves Tutsis who migrated to Uganda in the 1950s (52-53). Instead, she passionately hates them and wishes terrible things on them: "I watched what was happening to the other Tutsi families. I was glad to think that the same would happen to my father and his wife, and that revenge would be mine" (52). In several other instances in the book, the reader sees Keitetsi suffusing herself with feelings of hatred and death wishes against her father. For example, she "wish[ed] a car would hit [him] so that he would never return" (80), that "he would die and go to hell" (66), "hoped so much that the thieves would kill [him]" (83), and that she "would not cry if he died together with [her] stepmother, but [she] would if he died without her" stepmother (72). Such incidents are registers through which one could say that Keitetsi is hyperbolically – at times parodically – Freudian in her yearning for what Sigmund Freud describes as "a death-wish against a hated father" ("Dostoevsky" 447) because of an infraction she once suffered at his hands.

The urge to cause harm to her parents becomes stronger when she joins the NRA, where she "felt a lust for revenge" and always thought that "it seemed the right moment to take [her] tormentors out of [her] life forever" (118). Thus when Museveni preaches to a group of child soldiers gathered before him that they were fighting a just war against government troops who were responsible for killing and imprisoning their parents and relations, for example, Keitetsi thinks otherwise: "I knew where my parents were. I just hoped to stay alive so that one day I could go home and kill them. I decided they had to pay the price for the pain I was in" (103). In a remarkable study of how legal culpability must be placed in relation to the guilt of child soldiers, Mark Sanders argues that "parricidal phantasies" often grip child soldiers, and that "the notion of a *stolen childhood* (rather than a *lost* one) begins to shape [their] narratives retrospectively, planting in [them] the idea that that stolen thing might be recovered" ("Culpability" 215; original emphases). Sanders' views could be used here to point out that Keitetsi is beginning to look at her parents as 'the enemy' responsible for her deprivation and 'stolen childhood,' and that, therefore, they must "pay the price." This could be taken as Keitetsi's quest to resolve her liminal state and her painful experiences.

One way of explaining Keitetsi's resentment towards her parents is in terms of how abusive parenting can lead children into manifesting a lot of anxiety and fear. Children need a safe and secure home, free of violence, and parents that love and protect them. They need to have a sense of routine and stability, so that when things go wrong in the outside world, home is a place of comfort, help and support. This is also what Rosemary George seems to suggest in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (1996), where she conceives the word home as "connot[ing] the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, *shelter, comfort, nurture and protection*" (1; my emphasis). There is too much unresolved baggage to the life of someone who is exposed to violence, or who fails to find "shelter, comfort, nurture and protection" in the home. In the case of children, they typically enter a liminal zone when they fail to identify with a happy home. They usually become distrustful and disobedient to adults who scupper their hopes, or who constantly mistreat them. Most important of all, they grow to not only hate themselves and the adult who inflicts pain on them but they may resort to harming the said adult. In Parts 1 and 2 of her narrative, Keitetsi often thinks of causing grievous harm to her father, step-mother and grandmother and even wishes them dead. In harbouring these feelings, Keitetsi is perhaps reflecting George's warning of home as also being a place of terror. In George's view, "home is a desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure to the subjects" (2).

What is perhaps the height of Keitetsi's 'hellish' experience in the memoir is the fact that, even after she becomes a child soldier, she lives under cruel superiors who rape her and her fellow girl soldiers at will. These rapes leave in her a permanent loathing for Museveni, whom she thinks "should have realised what his monsters were doing to us" (128). In the various make-shift rebel camps, Keitetsi specifically talks of the brutalities of rape and the dreadful moments that would follow in the wake of an officer who would come and call one of them to see him later that day. Each time this happened, she explains, she would pray "to God, asking him to not let the day end because of that hour" (128). This "hour" was "nearly every evening [when] an officer would come and order you to report to his place, usually at 9 pm" (128). She adds that girl soldiers would "live in fear all day, thinking about 9 pm in the evening" (128). She adds that what these girls went through at the hands of Museveni's rebel groups was unbearable: "this was a taste of hell…. It was so painful I could only cry with my heart" (128). Keitetsi here draws on the infernal descent to tell us that what she went through was an experience of perpetual suffering where she felt utterly helpless.

Keitetsi lays the blame for these brutal atrocities squarely on Museveni for overlooking the abuse that she and other child soldiers endured, and thinks that all he cared for as a rebel leader (then) was power and personal grandeur at the expense of children like her: "In their eyes I saw only the promise of a victorious future filled with wealth and power. It was then that I realised that we children did not exist in our leaders' hearts, not even inside Museveni's" (103). As Keitetsi bitterly observes, "nothing changed and I was convinced the women soldiers in the NRA were nothing but Museveni's treats for the hungry lions in command" (172). Keitetsi then condemns Museveni and the NRA for failing to take full responsibility of the abuses the young girls suffered under his leadership. She relates:

> Most of us were too young to be mothers, but in the NRA there were no limits on anything because of your age. It was a crime for a child soldier to say, 'I cannot do this because I'm a child.' Too many young mothers had to work out how to be both mothers and fathers…. No one had asked these girls whether they were ready to be mothers, nor did any of these officers intend to take responsibility for their children. (171)

Museveni (and the senior military officers) are here presented as failed father figures. And so the seemingly endless cycle of suffering and betrayal continues: she runs away from one 'hellish' environment (her father's home), only for her to be exposed to a world of rape, early

pregnancy, torture and brutal murders in the rebel camps. This multiple suffering of the girl child is a crucial organising principle of *Child Soldier*. Her misadventures – the running away from home, the numerous rape attacks and her final escape from Uganda to Europe from where she 'writes back' to the Ugandan leadership of the time – seem to reflect katabasis. Read alongside the child soldier focaliser in the memoir, the katabatic trope raises pertinent issues on liminality, marginality and integration of child soldiers, and it is on these concepts that I now focus since they are crucial to understanding Keitetsi's fragmented self.

In their article "Mapping Child Soldier Reintegration Outcomes: Exploring the Linkages" (2012), Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder observe that "[b]ecoming a soldier marks a transition away from the normal and accepted, hence returning to a prior set of rules can be a significant challenge" ("Mapping" 312). As they further point out, attempts to make the child soldier return to 'normal' life "may need traditional interventions, involving ritualistic cleansing and sacrifice in societies with strong communitarian visions of death, illness and healing to create a socially acceptable return possible" ("Mapping" 312). Hence processually, "[t]raditional cleansing rituals … can be critical for the onset of reintegration processes informally, meant to spiritually realign well-being with the social world and discard identities and habits imbibed in the fighters' world" ("Mapping" 312). *Child Soldier* engages most clearly with lack of these traditional forms of reintegration when Keitetsi uses her text to express the child soldier's unending liminal and marginal state. This is exemplified in Part 4 of the memoir, where the author grapples with experiences designated by these terms, as well as with the problems of reintegration of child soldiers into the community. When Keitetsi escapes the battlefield and goes back to her biological mother's place, for example, she finds it difficult to fit into any social setting and get back into the rhythm of community life. After spending "three years away from the army" (123), she begins to internalise the belief that her life is cut out for the chaotic world of war:

> Suddenly I realised that I would have to start my life all over again if I wanted to make it. But there was no turning back. I saw that my childhood had vanished and I couldn't fit in with civilian life. *I needed an identity and the only place I felt I could find it again was back in the army*. I realised that I simply didn't fit into this community, being a small girl with a vast military experience. I hardly knew anything but the life of a soldier, so I decided to try again as a recruit. (122-123; my emphasis)

This passage evokes conventional elements of being both a liminal and a marginal subject. The reason why Keitetsi feels she "couldn't fit in with civilian life" lies in the fact that she

thinks she is a social 'outsider,' even though it is the same society that raised her (before she joined the army). But then, the fact that she runs away from the army harks back to a feeling of dissatisfaction with her 'new' identity as a soldier. Keitetsi's life as that of someone who embraces a suspended childhood identity thus seems complete. Her life was effectively disrupted by being plucked from childhood (albeit an abused one), into the military world; and now she can not fit back into a non-military context as she has acquired different values and skills, which, while indispensable in the warzone, are totally useless in living as a non-combatant in the non-militarised space of the village. In that case, we could argue that Keitetsi is socially a nonperson, existing in "a marginal state of social death," to use Orlando Patterson's evocative imagery of slavery (48).

Keitetsi's inability to integrate is reminiscent of a scene in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, where Agu, the novel's traumatised protagonist-narrator, ends up seemingly trapped by the hard life in a ruthless guerrilla unit and ultimately fails to see himself as settling back into civilian life. Agu has been indoctrinated into believing that there is no life outside the chaotic world of a rebel group. He has grown in an environment where, as he says in his pidgin English, "If they are ordering me KILL, I am killing, SHOOT, I am shooting, ENTER WOMAN, I am entering woman and not even saying anything even if I am not liking it. I am killing everybody, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, soldier. It is all the same. It is not mattering who it is, just that they are dying" (135). Agu's statement disrupts the myth that rapists enjoy what they do. Agu recognises rape as a weapon of war. Most important of all, he begins to see his superiors' commands as prisms through which he can operationalise his life. As readers, we are thus less surprised when we hear him saying that he can no longer fit into his (previous) childhood. He explains: "All we are knowing is that, before the war we are children and now we are not…. I am knowing I am no more child so if this war is ending I cannot be going back to doing child thing." (36, 93).

Agu, like Keitetsi, is irreparably changed by the brutal experiences of war. As child soldiers both of them seem not only concerned with how they are going to define themselves but also how they will be defined by society. Jo Boyden makes an incisive observation about the anxiety and fear that grips child soldiers post-war, noting that there is a general "social disquiet about children and adolescents who become involved in war" ("Moral" 347). Boyden is also concerned with the "dread" adults have for child soldiers who are perpetually perceived as a threat to society ("Moral" 345-347). Theresa Betancourt *et al* seem to echo

Boyden in their observation that child soldiers "often confront significant community stigma" which greatly impacts on their psychosocial adjustment ("Past Horrors" 17, 24). Suffice it to say that child soldiers suffer the most from deep emotional and psychological traumas because after the conflict is over, they still find themselves in a liminal state since they have not emerged from the liminal zone and they are yet to adopt their new social role and identity.

Overall, *Child Soldier* provides a complex reading of the challenges of reintegration faced by child soldiers after they have had a brutal taste of the world of war. The memoir is particularly poignant for suggesting that it is difficult to return to 'normal' life once a child soldier, for Keitetsi does not only "try again as a recruit" but she goes back to "living with injustice": terrorising the community, using drugs and being raped by her superiors. In Keitetsi's memoir, then, we see the dire consequences of living in a society that does not have strong structures of reconstruction and rehabilitation of those traumatised by the brutalities of war. I return to this in the concluding section of this chapter.

3.3. Uncanny Spaces, Parental Abuse and Unending Phobias: Mehari's *Heart of Fire*

Senait Mehari's *Heart of Fire,* a witness narrative that aroused a lot of public debate about its authenticity because of charges of false witnessing, is set in the early 1980s Eritrea. The memoir is about the author-cum-protagonist's groping efforts to recall her experiences in the Second Eritrean Civil War of 1980-81, in which she ostensibly participated as a child soldier. What gradually emerges is the story of a childhood lived in between the abuses of a dissociative and violent father on one hand and a freedom fighter group "on its last legs" of existence,[34] on the other. The book tells the story of a young girl who was forcefully sent away by her father to train and then fight with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) against the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Born to an Ethiopian mother and an Eritrean father, Mehari suggests that her life took a turn for the worse after her parents were indoctrinated into believing that they could no longer live together as husband and wife while their countries were at war.[35] As Mehari sadly recounts, "[t]he marriage … had ended before my birth. My father wanted nothing more to do with [my mother], or with me" (1). Frustrated

[34] Senait Mehari, *Heart of Fire: One Girl's Extraordinary Journey from Child Soldier to Soul Singer*. (Profile Books, 2006), p. 64. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[35] Eritrea launched an armed struggle for independence from Ethiopia in 1961 under a freedom fighter group known as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). In the early 1970s, a splinter group called the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was founded, following divisions within the ELF. The two factions – the ELF and the EPLF – then went to war against each other, in what is known as the Eritrean Civil War. The First Eritrean Civil War was fought from 1972 to 1974, while the Second Eritrean Civil War was fought from 1980 to 1981.

when her husband abandoned her to join the ELF, Mehari's mother, Adhanet, resolved to get rid of Senait (1) by "shutting [her] in a suitcase," abandoning her "on top of a wardrobe and [disappearing] into town" (2). Little Mehari is however rescued by her parents' neighbour who heard her crying and had called the police. The authorities jailed Adhanet "for six years for attempted infanticide" (2). Mehari is later sent to a state-run orphanage, before briefly staying at the Italian-run Daniel Comboni Catholic Convent. She also briefly spends her childhood "in [the] perfect, sheltered world of [her paternal] grandparents" (29) before she is handed over to her father, whom she dislikes from the start because he is improvident and uses violence to run his home.

Mehari's experiences of war and her participation in it only appear in Chapter 6 of the memoir, with the rest of the chapters only acting as props to these experiences. Eponymously titled "Morning Stars," Chapter 6 gives detailed accounts of what used to happen at the Jebha, a unit within the ELF that was notoriously known for recruiting "children between six and ten years of age, not as child soldiers yet but in preparation for fighting" (64). Its full name was "the Jebha al Tahrir or simply Jebha (front) or Tahrir ('morning star' – the name signifying youth, given to the younger brigades of the army'" (64; parentheses in original). Mehari describes herself as being "part of the last contingent" (64) of this group of young soldiers, who took on the rival EPLF. She also explains that as the last contingent, the young recruits were immediately given military training and then sent to the battlefront.

The story of Mehari's unpleasant experiences both at home and in the civil war is also the story of how the Eritrean civil war affected its people. For Mehari, however, her 'fidelity' to tell the 'true' story of her purported experiences (especially) during the civil war has drawn a lot of criticism from the public, who believe that she intentionally produced a false version of her life. The two issues raised here – to tell a true story about one's lived reality, and be taken to task for telling that story – raise interesting questions about genre and the way in which *Heart of Fire* crafts itself in this genre. That the memoir contains some elements of misrepresentation is, perhaps, undeniable, given the fact that Mehari herself admits to not being at the war front or even firing a gun; maintaining instead that the story told in the book is nonetheless similar to the experiences of thousands of children in Eritrea (I discuss this in detail later in this section). In part, this is what prompted Mehari's German publisher to

withdraw the German edition of the text from circulation.[36] The publisher also issued an official apology, stating that the book included "regrettable mistakes in relation to the character Agawegahta."[37] The publisher went on to indemnify Almaz Yohannes – the woman who claimed to be the Agawegahta portrayed in Mehari's memoir – after she filed a libel lawsuit in which she contested Mehari's story. But as I observe in Chapter One, criticising a text of witness of bearing elements of false witnessing does not in any way invalidate the text's entire account. I thus propose that what should not probably be taken away from Mehari's account is her ability to create what Natasha Rogers describes as a personal narrative "that can be used to create a particular, ideologically motivated version of events [that] explore the historical re-writing of the traumatic pasts of … exploitation, abuse, war and genocide" ("Representations" 19). It is these traumatic pasts that are imagined by Mehari as her lived experiences. In my view, *Heart of Fire* ought to be read as a human-rights testimony in which the author bears witness to issues that actually happened in Eritrea's history. In the same way as with Keitetsi, Mehari creates a retrospective narrative about the events of her life. She is writing a trauma narrative that re-examines her childhood in terms of her attitude and relationship with the people around her, as I discuss in detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

Another point that also needs foregrounding at this early stage, as it will help us better understand Mehari's story, is that of Ghebrehiwet, her father. Mehari portrays him as a terror in the home. She suggests that his irrational behaviour was because of his own cold upbringing during childhood. We are told that Ghebrehiwet had "a disturbed personality" (230), the result of living with a stepmother who used to "brand him with iron tongs and forced him to gnaw walls when he had said he was hungry" (191). His disturbed personality, we further learn, becomes more entrenched because of his fanatical commitment to a disintegrating rebel army: the ELF. Mehari's descriptions of her father's behaviour seem to confirm Judith Herman's understanding of former victims of atrocity. In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Herman suggests that for such people, a disturbed personality follows them, and its relationship to the violence that informs their lives is undeniable. According to Herman, there are only "a limited number of roles" available to them: "one can be a

[36] The fact that Mehari's German publisher withdrew *Feuerherz* (whose English equivalent is *Heart of Fire*) from circulation does not mean that it is not available to readers. In fact, English and French translations of the text are still available on Amazon, and they can easily be accessed by anyone.

[37] For details about the accusations and Mehari's admissions to them, see "TV report Stirs Up Controversy" par. 2-6 and "Eritrean Child Soldier Memoir Contains Errors" par. 1-6.

perpetrator, a passive witness, an ally, or a rescuer" (*Trauma* 92). These options notwithstanding, Herman is of the view that "the victim's greatest contempt is often reserved, not for the perpetrator, but for the passive bystander" (*Trauma* 92) because "long after their liberation, [these] people … bear the psychological scars of captivity" (*Trauma* 95) which may prevent them from leading normal lives. I find Herman's ideas useful in understanding Ghebrehiwet's actions. He symbolises the character of a broken man, with what Herman calls a "contaminated identity" (*Trauma* 94) that makes him internalise the negative self-image rubbed off onto him by his stepmother and his experiences in the war. Within the confines of this section, I give only minimal attention to Ghebrehiwet's traumatised past even though, it must be noted, his actions may have triggered Mehari to write this memoir.

The very first page of *Heart of Fire* introduces us to the angst and a foreboding atmosphere that threatens to destroy the personality of both father and daughter, when Mehari narrates that Ghebrehiwet, her father, never liked her. As the narrative progresses, this antipathy is deeply etched into the relationship between the two. We learn, for example, that upon being introduced to her father as a five-year-old girl, she "shied away from his greeting by hiding in Mbrat's [her aunt] skirt" (38). Even when Mbrat "pushed [Mehari] towards him," she "turned away, hunched and silent" (38). We learn that this is because her father "ha[d] done nothing to help" her while she was growing up (35). Mehari also states that "the dislike was mutual from the first instant" (38) she set her eyes on him, and that when she started living with him she soon became his favourite victim: "The longer I lived with him, the clearer it became that he had it in for me…. My father did not beat me merely as a matter of course, … but with a directed vindictiveness, regardless of whether I had done anything wrong" (48). Mehari even suspects that her father "was not quite so violent with his other children" but he was with her because of her rebellious personality: "I clung to my opinions even when he beat me; I put up a fight and never simply submitted to him" (48-49). Because Ghebrehiwet cannot stand his daughter's defiant and inquisitive spirit, he decides to kill her by taking her to the forest under the pretext that he wants the two of them to go and fetch firewood. While there he orders her to stand in front of a tree so he can fell her down with a machete. But just as he is about to kill her, Werhid, her stepmother, "[comes] running up to [them], screaming at [her] father. 'Stop it! Stop it! … We'll send Senait, Yaldiyan and Tzegehana to the Jebha!'" (51). Here, Werhid prefers sending the children away to join the rebel forces (known as the Jebha) rather than seeing them being killed by her husband. It is after the failed filicide that Mehari is handed over to the ELF by her father.

Mehari builds her case around this tense relationship with her father, revealing, as I have already alluded to, the terror she and her siblings experienced at home when she moved from Asmara to stay with him in the countryside and, later, when they join their father in Germany.[38] We learn, for example, that Ghebrehiwet is a bully at home, demonstrated through the way he "lashed out [at his family members] with blows whenever anything displeased him, which happened often" (47-48). Elsewhere in the book, he is portrayed as someone who was "horrible … to people outside the family" (40) since he generally derived great pleasure from humiliating others and diminishing their profiles. In Germany, for example, he is portrayed as being given to "punch-ups" with the Eritrean community and on a couple of occasions his children "felt so ashamed of [his] loutish behaviour" (189-190) that they "sometimes wondered how a man of his age could have such childish tantrums instead of behaving in a mature way" (190). A prevailing trope in the memoir is thus that of fear, planted in the hearts of Ghebrehiwet's children. This trope is reiterated in the text, especially in Mehari's reference to how she relates to him and the outer world:

> I was so afraid of him that I often peed in my pants the moment I heard him open the door. Whether I was doing my homework, having something to eat in the kitchen or standing elsewhere in the flat, I found it impossible to control my bladder when I heard my father coming home. Even before he had opened the door, I shot to the bathroom, where I waited until he had gone to the living room or the kitchen.
> As soon as I was sure of not bumping into him, I washed and changed my clothing and crept into my room like a hunted animal…. It was safest not to speak to him or have any contact with him at all, but even that did not always work. When he got into a rage about something, he used to knock and kick the door of my room until I was forced to open it. (183)

In *An Adult's Guide to Childhood Trauma* (1999), Sharon Lewis observes that one of the post-traumatic stress responses that traumatised children develop is a psychogenic condition called "hyperarousal," which she describes as a case where "trauma victims may feel and act as though they are constantly faced with more danger" and who feel "frightened, jumpy and experience sweating and a rapid heartbeat" (14). Lewis' observations throw light on Mehari's petrified state here. Her father's irrational behaviour amplifies her insecurity around him, and makes her "find it impossible to control her bladder" and "pee in her pants." This is because

[38] Ghebrehiwet resettles himself in Germany after the ELF, the faction he strongly supported and on whose side he fought, was defeated by the EPLF. Here, he meets a large community of fellow Eritreans, also running away from the civil war.

she is painfully aware of the consequences of not staying away from him or crossing his path, as she often puts it.

Besides chronicling the horrors in her home, however, Mehari also espouses the extent to which familial violence mirrors what is happening at the national level where we see whole families living in fear of "the enemy," understood in the memoir to be "the EPLF and the Ethiopians" (85). Most important of all, Mehari often uses the language of fear and helplessness as gripping the civilian population and turning the grown-ups into hostile beings: "And the war … made itself felt not only in gunfire, misery and hunger, but in the behaviour of the grown-ups around us, which ranged from the merely tense to the outright aggressive" (43). The importance of this statement rests in the fact that the humanity of ordinary Eritreans could not blossom because they were always apprehensive of what tomorrow would bring. Here, fear is presented as begetting another fear as well as aggression in the grown-ups, who then take their frustrations out on the children. In "Putting Place Back into Displacement: Reevaluating Diaspora in the Contemporary Literature of Migration" (2013), Christiane Steckenbiller also emplots Mehari's fear within the general malaise that grips the entire Eritrean society because of the ongoing war. Steckenbiller notes, for example, that "Senait's childhood … is [full] of unprecedented terror, governed by the violent war between the neighbouring states of Eritrea and Ethiopia and the relentless recruitment of child soldiers, one of them [being] Senait herself" ("Putting" 109). This view – that Mehari's case as a petrified and dissociated child is as a result of what the war is doing to the civilian population – leads me to suggest that violent and dysfunctional contexts can become dominant discourses in the fashioning of a person's selfhood and identity.

This qualification points to the residual post-traumatic stress response that we see in Mehari's teenage life and, in my view, accounts for her low self-esteem, anger, depression and indifference to pain and lack of feeling for others. This is reflected in *Heart of Fire* in the way Mehari feels *nothing* towards either herself or Stefan, her boyfriend. She is racked with a psychogenic condition known as dissociative identity disorder, which leads her to turn her anger on herself by, among other things, cutting and bruising her own body so that she can "feel something." She relates, for example, how her boyfriend

> went crazy because he wanted to sleep with [her] but [she] was wrapped up in the protective layers that built up from [her] past, and could feel neither pain nor desire. [She] was silent, cold, still and unreceptive to his advances. When this numbness got

> too much for [her, she] cut [her] legs with a knife when [she] was alone, in order to feel something. (199)

An important point which Mehari seeks to drive home here, and which could be viewed as an exploration of bodily self-harm, is that traumatised subjects bear what psychoanalysts call a dysfunctional personality. In the context of the author-narrator, this trait is the result of Mehari being raised in violent environments (her father's and the ELF's makeshift home/s). Thus I argue that there are additional reasons for Mehari's suspended identity and her feeling of anger and disappointment, some of which speak to her experiences as a child caught up in intra- and inter-state conflicts. As discussed in the subsequent paragraphs of this section, *Heart of Fire* responds to the life of someone whose identity is in the interstices largely because of her experiences in both the Eritrean war of independence (1961-1991) and the Second Eritrean Civil war (1980-1981). As the memoir's subtitle – *One Extraordinary Girl's Journey from Child Soldier to Soul Singer* – suggests, it is engaged with Mehari's attempt at finding her self-worth in the web of these social upheavals.

As already alluded to, *Heart of Fire* focuses more on the effects of war on the civilians than on Mehari's 'action' in the battlefield. Indeed, apart from carrying a heavy Kalashnikov which was "pressed into [her] arms" by Agawegahta (84), Mehari does not portray herself as a combatant. In fact, she admits that she "was much too cowardly and hated the military training and exercises" (80) and that the Kalashnikov was "a burden to [her], a very clear sign of [her] physical weakness" (86). She also relates that as a young child in the ELF, she would purposely sit out the rigours of military training and real combat: "I … join[ed] in everything except fighting with guns. I did not want to murder in the name of Eritrea" (123). Her resentment of the gun, and military life, finds further resonance in the confessional way she relates her bitter experiences in the Eritrean Civil War:

> I did not want to, and could not, carry my machine gun with me all the time. It was an awkward lump of metal far too large for me to hang from my shoulder as the older children did as they worked in the camp, marched around or took cover crawling over the ground. The gun was also much too heavy for me to be able to carry it as well as a canister of water, a bundle of firewood or a spade. If I carried the gun on my back, it pulled me backwards; if I cradled it to my chest, it yanked me forwards .... It was difficult to climb with the gun, and it knocked against my legs whenever I bent down to pick something up …. It was an impossible thing to carry around – I didn't want to have it with me at all. (85)

Although some would look at this as a mark of cowardice, as Mehari herself also admits, I insist that her actions are forms of resistance, albeit minimally, to the coercive manner in which she is conscripted into the ELF, and the way she is being treated as a young child in the army.

It is important to recognise, however, that Mehari's views in the passage above do not preclude her from being called a child soldier. A child soldier is not always involved in carrying arms or fighting on the battle front. More crucially, not all children involved in war are combatants. Due to their age, most of them are used as porters, cooks, spies, messengers, or providing sexual services to (usually) older male soldiers. As such Mehari fits perfectly into the description of a child soldier, for although she resisted carrying a gun and fighting in the war, she and the other children her age were constantly being used by the older soldiers to fetch firewood and water, among other tasks, as she reports: "we were sent off to collect firewood. We crawled on all fours through thick undergrowth, picking up branches and roots and breaking off dry twigs with our bare hands. We had no saws, knives or machetes to help us" (57-58). And in another incident, they are ordered to pull the dead out of the river together with fellow soldiers: "The next day Agawegahta summoned a few of us younger children – those who were not carrying machine guns yet – and told us to get the bodies out of the river (75-76). Although still children – from the standpoint of Alcinda Honwana's biological immaturity – Agawegahta orders Mehari and her peers to bury the dead, as if they are adults:

> Getting the bodies out into the undergrowth was only the first step. We had to bury them quickly to keep them from the jackals, the rats and the flies, and also to bury the all-pervasive smell…
> We started digging on the same day. There were not enough spades to go round, so some of us had to dig with our hands. We also had to heave rocks out of the ground to create a grave large enough for all the bodies. While moving a gigantic rock with the others as darkness was falling, I was suddenly overcome by a wave of putrescence so strong that I fainted. It was night when I regained consciousness, and the stink of the corpses was still in the air. (77)

This is an important moment of self-inscription in the memoir, as it gives further testimony to the plight of children exposed to and involved in organised hostilities and combat. Young or old, weak or strong, they always have tasks cut out for them. These tasks, as seen in the passage above, are not only unfit for them but also traumatise them for many years to come. Mehari's fainting because of the "wave of putrescence" from the corpses thus anticipates the

psychosocial impacts of war and war-related activities on child soldiers. Most important of all, war experience may lead to the suspension of the child soldier's identity. I propose that the act of pulling dead bodies out of the river and burying them – a task unfit for people her age in most societies – makes Mehari inhabit a space that is neither a child's nor an adult's.

At one level, this is the condition of all "liminal *personae*," understood by Victor Turner as individuals whose characteristics are "essentially ambiguous, unsettled, and unsettling" (*Dramas* 274), since they "elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (*Ritual* 95). I find Turner's observations particularly enabling for my textual construction of Mehari's suspended identity. As a child who is removed from the idyllic home of her paternal grandparents in Eritrea's capital, Asmara, to join her father in the countryside and who, later, constantly runs away from "the enemy" as a child soldier, she fails to find her true mark in her formative years since she does not gain proper guidance from those who should have provided it to her. Her status as a child thus "becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (Turner, *Dramas* 232). This punctures her confidence and leaves her in the potentially unending, liminal stage of a symbolic rite of passage. This is exemplified in Mehari's self-reflexivity after she witnesses four fellow child soldiers being court-martialled and then executed for attempting to escape from war. She begins to think that unlike them:

> I was the only one who had never imagined running away because I had no home to go back to. I would not have gone back to live with my father for all the world…. After all that I had seen and lived through since [joining the ELF], I could not simply go back to playing the same games with the same children in those small streets in Asmara that I had known so well. I was a different person now, and I could not go back. (100)

Here, Mehari, like Keitetsi in *Child Soldier*, is lamenting her lost childhood and her inability to fit into her previous life as a child. She also regrets the fact that she has no place she could call home and confidently go back to, if she were to desert the war front like her fellow child soldiers had attempted to. This is understandable, given the fact that all her life she has been on the run, moving from one makeshift home to the next, and, maybe, also because the only place she could call home is marked by her father's violence. When she finally becomes a child soldier, she is made to do things an ordinary Eritrean child would not do. All these things make her feel that she is different from the other children on the streets of Eritrea, for example. But Mehari is also not the *complete* child soldier in the way the rest of her age-

grade is for, as she admits, she "was too young to be a soldier" (63) and that she "kept away [from training as a child soldier] instinctively, knowing that [she] would hate such training" (78). By choosing to neither touch the gun nor participate in the routine training, Mehari could be read as prolonging her stay in a liminal period where she is without proper identification, "no longer classified and not yet classified" (Turner, *Forest* 96). She is neither the ordinary Eritrean child nor the brainwashed child soldier who accepts everything the grown-ups feed her. Mehari thus occupies a space between the child she should have been and the child soldier she loathes becoming. This space problematises the limited options and roles available to children in her state of mind and context.

To further understand the overarching philosophical framework of Mehari's self-reflexivity, it is instructive to discuss a few other incidents that happen to her while she is with the ELF. As one might see, incidents of fear and innocence are very much at the centre of *Heart of Fire*. Mehari is not just dogged by fear, however. She also presents herself as an innocent bystander-turned-victim/perpetrator, and, as such, it is not surprising that her personality changes from childhood simplicity and ignorance to a postlapsarian world of lost innocence:

> I felt someone approaching me. A hand reached out and pulled me around while another hand pressed me to the dirt floor and yet another hand … tugged at my dress and pulled at my pants.
> I curled myself into a tight trembling ball and tried to scream, but a hand had been clamped over my mouth. I knew what was about to happen. I jerked upright….
> … One of the boys tried to penetrate me while the other one held me down. I managed to get one hand free, and pushed away the boy who was holding his hand over my mouth. I screamed so loudly that they let me go. They had not succeeded this time. (123)

We can read three patterns in the development of Mehari's mind here. First, we notice her knowledge of "what was about to happen" to her. Tellingly, this is probably expected of her given that she has been forced, from quite a tender age, to share 'bedrooms' with boys/men in the various ELF mobile camps. She thus learns from experience about "the difference between boys' and girls' bodies" as well as the "secret [probably related to sexual activities] that the boys shared with each other" (124). One could argue that perverted sexual acts in children exposed to and involved in conflicts is high since they are exposed to sexual violence from the day they join the rebel forces. Katunga Minga makes a similar observation in his study of child soldiers in African Francophone war literature. Minga believes that because of their exposure to and involvement in war, the young become "perverted in some

way," and "their thoughts often turn toward sex in a way that appears shocking to a conservative society" (141). Such 'knowledge of the flesh' complicates and challenges our understanding of a child's moral compass, especially in contexts of extreme violence and lack of proper mentorship. Second, there is some form of change from being innocent of the knowledge about sex to carnal knowledge which, I propose, is representative of a child's loss of innocence. The new (emotional, social, political and cultural) space a child is exposed to in contexts of crisis, then, becomes the new form of description and does not allow him/her to be construed as innocent any more. Needless to wonder, then, that most child soldiers either participate in rape or are raped. Finally, there is Mehari's spirited fight to keep the boys off her which anticipates the long-overdue decision we see her take towards the end of the memoir where she finally walks away from her abusive father. This is demonstrated through her description of how she "curled [herself] into a tight … ball" and "pushed away the boy" who tried to penetrate her, and in her half-celebration that the boys "had not succeeded this time." What shimmers under the surface of Mehari's *Heart of Fire*, then, is the image of a liminal child whose life drifts into the abyss of inhuman and degrading treatment through which we see her being abused by both her father and fellow soldiers.

Eventually, though, Mehari's life changes especially after she meets Haile, her uncle. It is Haile who first risks his life and his well-paying job with the Red Cross in Khartoum by disguising himself "in the long white robes of the Bedouins, and spend[ing] a few days with them in the desert in order to study their behaviour" (152-153), before he successfully "arranged a daring escape" for her and her step-sisters (qtd. in the blurb). It is also Haile who develops a keen interest in her welfare and education, and who "takes the trouble to explain things to [her]" (150) whenever her rights as a child are threatened or even violated. During this rehumanisation, Mehari learns how to assert herself. This helps her "to make a decision that was long overdue" (194), later, when she reunites with her father and stepmother in Germany: a "complete separation" from "the pressures and humiliations of life with [her] father" (194, 195). The newfound freedom this decision affords her has its downside, however: sleeping and eating rough, deflated moods, constant fights and fresh beatings from her boyfriend, petty theft, and prevarication. But the break is also what she needs to weave her own life and launch herself into a career in music that, in the end, helps her to complete her "extraordinary journey from child soldier to soul singer." It also allows her to reunite with her long-lost family members and heal from the wounds she had suffered since childhood at the hands of cruel and insensitive elders, as she narrates in the closing pages of her memoir.

3.4. Sectarian Violence, Liminality and 'the Unhomely': Jal's *War Child*

In *The Sudan: Ethnicity and National Cohesion* (1984), Mohamed Omer Beshir explains that in pre-independence Sudan, ethnicity and national cohesion in the country's previous civil boundaries as well as its political, religious and ethnic divisions were highly centralised. He notes that a precursor to the current civil conflicts in Sudan lies in the 1820s during the first Turko/Egyptian colonial regime (1821-1885) when a militarised system of governance was instituted. The second colonial administration by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium (1899-1956) reinforced the previous colonial structure from Khartoum, from where the General Government of Sudan (GGOS) was based. In *A History of Modern Sudan* (2008), Robert Collins provides a similar explanation, adding that the first step towards the politicization of Sudan's North/South[39] ideological divisions occurred when the colonial regime administered the North and the South as separate entities. The North was regarded as the mainstay of Islam while Christianity was encouraged in the South. This strategy was partly employed because the colonial regime perceived the South to be similar to the Eastern African colonies in many aspects, whilst the North was similar to the Middle East. It was also employed to counter the spread of Islam with the aim of avoiding the return of Mahdi.[40]

Following from this, the integration of North and South as a single administrative region was not going to be simple. When Britain finally granted Sudan independence in 1956, for example, the North was allowed exclusive governmental control whilst the South was granted semi-autonomous rule. A temporary constitution was put in place, because the two Sudans could not agree on whether Sudan should be a federal or unitary state, or whether it should have a secular or an Islamic constitution. While Southern politicians favoured federalism as a way of protecting the southern provinces from being completely subordinated to the Northern-dominated central government, most northerners rejected the idea of federalism, seeing it as a first step towards separation between the North and the South. In *The Southern Sudan* (1975), Beshir gives a detailed account of how these disagreements solidified into a clear demarcation of regional and racial-cum-ethnic differences, and how they led to the First

[39] My understanding and use of the terms 'North/erners' and 'Khartoum-led government' in this study is with reference to Sudan (also known as North Sudan or the Republic of Sudan). The terms 'South' or 'Southern/ers' is in reference to South Sudan, which claimed independence from Sudan in 2011.

[40] Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdi was a Sufi sheikh of the Samaniyya order in Sudan who proclaimed himself as the messianic redeemer of the Islamic faith on 29 June 1881. He led an independence movement to free Sudan from the Turko/Egyptian rule, and later became a national hero to the Muslim Arab in the North.

Sudanese Civil War. In 1958, Beshir notes, southern politicians left parliament in protest over the decision by the northern politicians to adopt a national constitution which would define Sudan as exclusively Arab[41] and Islamic in character (47-49).

Suffice it to say that the civil war in Sudan has been in existence since the mid-1950s, making it possibly the longest civil conflict in the world. In the words of Jeffrey Haynes, since the early 1970s more than two million people have died and over four million have been displaced ("Religion" 312). What initially started as a clash of ideologies between North and South, Muslim against Christian, 'Arab' against 'African' has now mutated into fighting "for the total control of abundant resources" (Johnson xiii) by groups and rival factions. As Johnson observes, "Sudan entered the twenty-first century mired in not one but many civil wars" (xiii). These intra-state conflicts are especially rife in the eastern, western and northern parts of the country. Bereketeab provides a useful summary of the reasons behind these intra-state conflicts in the three parts of Sudan. They hinge on what he calls "the reality of remaining at the margins of central power, which is located in Khartoum, power that has stubbornly proved to be discriminatory, exploitative and repressive" (9). As an expression of their dissatisfaction, and in seeking their rightful place in the post-colonial Sudanese state, insurgent groups in the east, west and north have relentlessly engaged the central government, advocating the end of the marginalization of the people they insist to represent.

The new state of South Sudan is no exception, as it is already mired with intra-state conflicts where some dissident officers are challenging the Government of South Sudan for failing to rise above ethnic/racial politics. It is these internal fissures within South Sudan that this section seeks to explore, with particular focus on how racism/ethnicity, religion and sectarianism continue to divide Sudan. Using the case of factional fighting between the North and the South on the one hand and within South Sudan on the other, I examine particularism, ethnicity and religion as important registers in the destruction of the social fabric in Emmanuel Jal's *War Child*. In what ways do these registers mirror the age-old dichotomy

[41] In *From Bush to Bush: Journey to Liberty in South Sudan*, Steven Wöndu clarifies that in Sudan the term Arabs "has nothing to do with the real Arabs of the Middle East." Instead, it stands for "the people of Northern Sudan" who speak Arabic as their first language. Wöndu further explains that only "a few of [these people] are genealogical Arabs but the majority are African Muslims who prefer to consider themselves Arabs." In South Sudan these "Arabs" are also referred to "as *Jalaba* [also spelt as *Jallaba*] or *Mundukuru*" (xii). Likewise, the term Africans or Blacks is often used to indicate people from sedentary, mainly agricultural groups, such as the Fur, the Masalit and to some extent the Zaghawa. The distinction between Arabs and Africans is not always clear cut in Sudan. For further details, see Deng, *War of Visions* 3-6; and Jok 2-5.

and hatred between the North and South? What tensions and contradictions emerge from the re-enactment of these registers within South Sudan? How are they mapped onto the psyche of a child who is exposed to their violent aftermath? And what identity formation holds for the child, especially if that child is forced to become a soldier? These are the questions that this section attempts to address.

In "*The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (1999), Michael Ignatieff underlines the destructive power of ethnic warfare, especially when it bears nationalist sentiments. For Ignatieff, "Nationalism is a fiction: it requires the willing suspension of disbelief. To believe in nationalist fictions is to forget certain realities…. [I]t means forgetting that [someone] was once a neighbour, brother, and friend to the people [living] next [to him]" (38). Owing to the callous manner in which it is executed, narcissism of minor differences often leads to in-group violence against the out-group. It turns neighbours into overnight enemies or, as Ignatieff observes, "people who once had a lot in common end up having nothing in common but war" (35). It also leads neighbours to "vilify and demonise people they once called friends" (36). Ignatieff's views resonate with this section's examination of the reasons behind Sudan's internecine conflicts for two reasons. First, racial and religious differences are portrayed as the basis of fratricidal clashes between the North and the South. The Muslim-dominated northern Sudan regards the largely non-Muslim Sudanese of the South as beneath them and as their slaves. This is what Robert Collins also means when he observes that in the history of Sudan, the term "'Sudani' had a pejorative connotation" in that it carries "a label of national identity defined as Arab and Islamic that made it narrow and exclusive and holding little or no appeal to … non-Muslim, non-Arab Africans" (9). P.M. Holt and M.W. Daly further point out how, in pre-independence times, "the non-Arab tribes [of] the South … were frequently raided for slaves" by their northern counterparts (6), thereby confirming the slave-master dichotomy that still exists in Sudan's oral discourse today. Second, ideological and personal differences between the Dinka and the Nuer within South Sudan continue to be channelled along racial/ethnic lines and are the source of renewed conflicts. These observations are thus good pointers to the socio-political texture of modern Sudan and the sectarian violence that is reflected in Jal's memoir.

In *War Child*, Jal Jok – a.k.a. Emmanuel Jal[42] – recounts his experiences of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) between the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and their Christian followers on the one hand and the Arabs on the other, in which he took part as a child soldier. As a young boy of seven, Jal is sent away to Ethiopia by his father, Commander Simon Jok of the rebel Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army as part of a well-coordinated operation called 'warehousing' children for war.[43] The place in Ethiopia where Jal and the other boys spent their first two years is Pinyudu, "one of the three huge refugee camps just over the Ethiopian border where almost 400,000 Sudanese refugees fled" (62). It is in Pinyudu that Jal gets indoctrinated about the might of the SPLA (whose command base was only a few miles away) and the wickedness of the Arabs. Jal and his fellow boys spend their time between hustling for food and attending occasional SPLA organised meetings and military trainings in nearby Bonga where he is further taught to believe that the Arabs are bad people. Jal recounts that each time he attended these meetings, he felt "the spear of anger and hatred rising in [his] chest" (69), and that he began looking forward to a day of reckoning when he was going to "pay back the *jallabas*" (89) for what they had done to his people.

Jal takes us into his confidence, telling us how and why his father abandoned his job as a policeman working in the northern part of Sudan to join the SPLA rebel forces; how, as a six-year-old boy, he witnessed a Muslim soldier rape Aunt Sarah (15-17) and, later, recalls how the same rape incident is perpetrated by SPLA soldiers (103); about how "bigger soldiers" sodomised child soldiers in camps (109-110); about how he participated in terrorising the Anyuak villagers and in looting their homes for food; about how, in Waat, he was rescued by Emma McCune, an Englishwoman married to Dr Riek Machar who "had fallen in love with Sudan on a visit in 1986 and returned three years later to help aid agencies set up schools" (182), and who put him back in school after smuggling him to Kenya; and about his struggles at school in Kenya, especially after he lost Emma to a car accident, and Mrs Mumo took him

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[42] Emmanuel was one of the names Jal Jok had been christened with at Pinyudu each time he "was baptized in the church and the river," the other two being "John' and "Michael." Jal Jok tells us that he preferred the name "Emmanuel" to the other two "because someone had told [him] it meant 'God is with us,' and also because [his saviour from the war front] was Emma [McCune]." Emmanuel Jal and Megan Lloyd Davies, *War Child: A Boy Soldier's Story*. (Abacus, 2010), pp. 184, 67. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[43] In *Children at War* Peter Singer alleges that the SPLA had begun a practice of 'warehousing' young recruits in the mid-1980s. It used to encourage and organise young boys to flee to refugee camps located beside its bases on the Ethiopian border. At the boys-only camps, those past the age of 12 would be given full-time military courses, while those younger were trained during school breaks. These boys became the basis of what was known as the Red Army, and were even subcontracted out to the Ethiopian army while it was still allied with the SPLA. Many of these boys later became the core of the famous Lost Boys of Sudan (24-25).

in. The link between the SPLA and the Ethiopian government is also unravelled. We learn, for example, that "while the *khawajas* [i.e. UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Programme, Save the Children, Red Cross, and Médecins sans Frontières] thought they ran [Pinyudu] camp, it was the SPLA who were really in charge. They controlled many things and had an important friend in Ethiopia – the ruler Mengistu Haile Mariam…. The SPLA grew strong with his help" (66). Scott Peterson explains that this was possible because "the Marxist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam welcomed the opportunity to back the [SPLA] rebels, as a counterweight to Sudan's support for Eritrea and Tigrean separatists who were fighting him in northern Ethiopia" (202), and that on his part, Yoweri Museveni supported the SPLA as a retaliatory measure against the Khartoum-led government for embarking on a "policy of waging war through proxy militias [by] secretly arm[ing] … the Lord's Resistance Army, to hassle Sudan rebels and north Uganda alike" (213). These underhand guerrilla tactics reveal the transnational nature of African conflict, in which the consequences of internal strife in one country spill over to neighbouring countries. That Jal immediately joins the rebel forces is a foregone conclusion as, like most young boys his age, he was induced to join in the conflict because of what Honwana fears to be "intimidation, social pressure, physical protection, the opportunity for revenge, access to food and shelter, security, and adventure" (*Child* 37). At the end of the narrative, after he is smuggled out of Sudan by Emma McCune and gets resettled in Kenya, Jal learns to forgive himself, to regain his humanity and, finally, embrace music and religion as tools for healing his soul and uniting his war-ravaged country.

The volte-face imposed on Jal's story, by which the ending of the text suggests a complete turnaround in the author's behaviour and attitude, harks back to the conversion narrative genre. Associated with 17th and 18th century religious practices, conversion narratives had, as their basis, converts giving testimonies about their spiritual rebirth or intensification of religious experiences. It involves, as well, structuring one's life "around a radical transformation from a faulty 'before' self to an enlightened 'after' self" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 192). The conversion narrative, according to Smith and Watson, "develops through a linear pattern – descent into darkness, struggle, moment of crisis, conversion to new beliefs and worldview, and consolidation of a new communal identity" (*Reading* 70). The trope is adopted in literary studies today to signify the spiritual and ideological reversal of the protagonist's former convictions, often revealed through his or her ability to lead a changed life. John Freccero describes the special coherence of the conversion narrative as tautological,

with its "central syntactic moment" ensuring the evolving identity not only of narrator and protagonist but of form and content as well:

> Conversion is both the subject matter of [the] work and the precondition for its existence. Form and content are therefore in some sense analogous, inasmuch as conversion not only is a traditional religious experience, but also has its counterpart in language, where it may be defined as that central syntactic moment in which the ending marks the beginning and the circular identity of the author coincides with the linear evolution of his persona. ("Logology" 64)

On the level of form, Jal portrays himself as evolving from the indoctrinated, 'bad' child who used to participate in the killings, looting and napalm to a young man who turns to God and music as modes of preaching the message of love, peace and unity to fellow Sudanese. Jal's agency, in making gospel (rap) music, rather than the barrel of a gun, a tool for spreading peace in South Sudan,[44] seems to mirror the religious motif familiar in most conversion narratives. But while the conversion narrative trope is arguably dominant in *War Child*, its engagement with change only makes sense, as I have argued, if one locates the memoir within the religious and racial tensions on one hand and the historical fact and fiction behind its construction, on the other.

In *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures* (1955), Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein opine that adults view children as "pygmies among giants" (7). In *War Child*, Jal turns this image on its head, describing the ruthless manner in which he and his fellow *jenajesh* (or child soldiers) go about terrorising the Anyuak and stealing from them, armed with AK47s. As Jal puts it, "The gun ... made me feel like a man. I knew people would do what I said, because I had an AK. With an AK47 you can get food, respect, anything you want. Even when you are nine years old" (qtd. in Hodges 126). Using an AK47, Jal maintains, "makes you think that no one can touch you. It makes you do dangerous things…. Once you've fired an AK47 you become brave" (qtd. in Hodges 127). Jal's words echo those of Birahima, a character in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obliged*. In his rendition of his experiences as a child soldier under various military factions during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Birahima explains that "with the AK-47s the small-soldiers got every-fucking-thing.

[44] The last four chapters and the Epilogue of Jal's *War Child* read like a religious swansong, in which Jal turns to God and music to preach about peace and love as the only modes that can unite a divided Sudan. Jal is also a full-time musician. In 2005, he released the song *Gua*, which means 'peace' in Nuer, his native language. For details, see Crilly, "How a Child Soldier Became a Star Rapper" par. 7.

They had money …. They had shoes and stripes and radios and helmets and even cars they call four-by-fours" (*Allah* 37). For many writers on child soldiers in African war literature, looting and terrorising innocent civilians is an enduring trope of figuration. Johnny, the 16-year-old co-protagonist and soldier in the Mata Mata (or Death Dealers) militia group in Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* even confesses that looting is "the main reason we were fighting. To line our pockets. To become adults. To have all the women we wanted. To wield the power of a gun" (*Johnny* 64). In Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obliged*, Birahima makes a similar observation, that "in tribal wars …, the child soldiers … don't get paid. They just kill people and steal everything worth stealing…. They massacre the people and keep everything worth keeping" (*Allah* 44). What we get out of these revelations is that child soldiers feel immortal with their AK47s, and that "with this tool opportunities present themselves, from raiding and looting, to politically-driven genocide" (Strauss "Tropical" 18). These admissions stress the vicious power of the AK47. The effects it has on the body, psyche and mind of the child soldiers drive them to commit all sorts of atrocities, including, for Jal, feeling excited and ready to "take more risks when you go into battle" (Hodges 127).

I locate Jal and his fellow child soldiers' story of the AK47 and napalm within the context of religious and ethnic violence. In Jal's memoir, the legacy of Sudan as divided by God (as Scott Peterson succinctly puts it) is deeply etched into the narrative, and is inseparably intertwined with the competing and at times contradictory rhetoric of belonging either to the Christian/animist South or the predominantly Arab Muslim North. In the memoir, religion becomes the site of contestation in modern Sudan, where the Khartoum-led government thinks "the SPLA and their Christian followers" cannot equally benefit from the country's resources since, Jal relates, they are merely "slaves beneath [the Arabs] just as they are meant to be" (4), while the SPLA insist on fighting back to reclaim their land from the "merciless Arabs," blamed in the memoir "for every drop of blood spilled, for every child left lying in the dust, for every boy stolen as a slave, for every girl taken" (75). As a rhetorical device for justifying violence, religion thus fans the flames of the extant racial/ethnic hatred in Sudan. These incidents appear incrementally in the course of the memoir, such that Jal begins to think that the Arabs are his number one enemy and, therefore, they should pay the price for putting him and his people (by which he means Southern Sudanese) in a perpetual condition of slavery and servitude. From the above description, what is being staged in *War Child* is what Peterson describes as "a modern extension of the Crusades" in which "religious aspects have turned into red lines, even a *casus belli*" (174; original emphasis). Indeed, Jal's memoir

overstates religion as a basis for waging war to what may be considered unprecedented extents, resulting in thematic and tropic saturation that makes it read at times like a historical account of the age-old "religious battlefield [that] mirrored the victories and defeats of Christianity and Islam in Europe and the Middle East" (Peterson 177). Read against the earlier mentioned tensions between the North and the South, fundamentalism provides a useful metaphor for conceptualizing the ideological differences between the two Sudans.

A significant feature of *War Child*, then, is that it mimics these racial/ethnic tensions in its complicated treatment of the vicious transference of blame and resentment that both the government and rebel forces have towards each other, which seems to be a continuation of the historical feuds that have existed "between the north and the south [of Sudan] since biblical times, when the territory was known as Cush" (Peterson 176-177). It is corrosive hatred arising from this troubled past that sustains the narrative structure of the memoir, and which drives Jal to take his revenge on the Arabs. This attitude only changes later when, inspired by speeches of Martin Luther King Jr and the religious teachings of Mrs Mumo in Kenya, he is able to see that the Civil War in Sudan is not entirely a battle of religions as he had been told to believe, at least not when he is able to tell that "where Muslim and Christian had once fought each other, the [Khartoum-led] government was now killing its own – black Muslims who'd fought and died for it in the war against the South" (242). Jal's new insight thus becomes the central idiom of a reformed character-cum-activist that we see in the memoir's Afterword. This new character is able to admit that he "no longer hate[s] Arabs because [his] understanding has widened." Unlike in the beginning when he "was young and blinded by rage," he is "now … older and know[s] that … not every Muslim is bad, just as not every Christian is good, just as the colour of people's skins does not drive them to evil" (266-67). He is also able to see the issue of an Arab Muslim north battling an African Christian south as anachronistic: the war in Sudan, he realises, is "fought largely over oil" (265) and not because of religious and ethnic differences as whipped up by the leadership on both sides of the warring factions. Such observations coming from Jal recast the "North and South, Muslim against Christian, 'Arab' against 'African'" debate as Douglas Johnson also observes in *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (xiii).

Two clusters of ideas, then, provide a means by which to understand Jal's narrative. These are hatred and religion, which seem to implicate each other in their collusion to divide a nation that is already polarised along ethnic/racial and geographical lines. Freud describes

hate as an ego state that wishes to destroy the source of its unhappiness. Hatred is due to a deep-seated emotional dislike for someone or something and it is "often associated with feelings of anger and a disposition to hostility" (Chabra et al 11715). Since hatred is "a form of animosity, frustration and hostility" (Chabra et al 11715), it gives rise to the psychological descent into violence. The point, following these observations, is that hatred is synonymous with destruction of both the hater and the hated. Perhaps this is what leads Liu Xiaobo to say that hatred is "corrosive of a person's wisdom and conscience," and that if left unchecked, "the mentality of enmity can poison a nation's spirit, instigate brutal life and death struggles, destroy a society's tolerance and humanity, and block a nation's progress to freedom and democracy" (4-5). Of the various explanations concerning how hatred replays itself in human affairs, the ones that are pertinent to this study are that it can lead to assigning of blame, harbouring hostile feelings towards others, disgust and revulsion, and a burning desire to destroy the enemy. Hate, in this sense, "is traumatizing physically, emotionally and morally" (Chabra et al 11715), and is an emotion that masks personal insecurities. Jal's combination of religion and hatred as thematic strands for his memoir works to recreate the experience of a country divided by irredentism so that readers can better understand the damaging psychological and psychosocial effects this has on its people. Therefore, when Jal finally decides to let go of his anger and turn to music as a mode for uniting the country, he challenges his compatriots to reconcile their loyalties for the goodness of the greater Sudan, which has been at civil war since 1955.

As already alluded to, a factor that tears Sudan apart lies in the way its people deal with the national question and its erstwhile expression, nationalism. In Africa, nationalism has always been closely associated with the history of the oppressed or colonised. At the time African states were fighting to decolonise themselves from European countries, nationalism involved three things: asserting one's humanity, gaining independence from the colonial masters, and maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of the new state. In that sense, nationalism was a good thing since it was an affirmation of freedom from white supremacist rule. Since then, however, a new national consciousness has swept across most post-independent African countries; one that, according to Frantz Fanon, is "a crude, empty, fragile shell" (*Wretched* 97) as most countries have slid back to "regression" because of the way ethnicity is preferred to nation and the tribe is preferred to the state. As Fanon observes:

> Instead of being the coordinated crystallization of the people's innermost aspirations, instead of being the most tangible, immediate product of popular mobilization, national consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe – a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity. (*Wretched* 97)

The issues raised by Fanon are relevant here, since they contain a germ of great potential in understanding the prebendalism as well as the historicity and specificity of racial/ethnic tensions in Sudan's national consciousness, as well as in most postcolonial African states.

The similarity between Fanon's views that ethnicity is the arch-enemy of most postcolonial nations and the patterns found in *War Child* is almost uncanny, and it is on this concept that I now focus, since an effect of the uncanny is crucial to much of the memoir's ontological unsettlement. Sigmund Freud (after Ernst Jentsch) uses the term "uncanny" or "unhomely" to describe the combined experience of familiarity and strangeness surrounding "what is frightening – or what arouses dread and horror" (*Writings* 193). We generally feel uneasy or unsettled towards such situations since they bring with them some form of dread. Central to the notion of the unhomely is a feeling of uneasiness. In its focus on the ravages of the civil war in Sudan, *War Child* suggests that the senseless killings there have left an uncanny effect on its people; one that is also attentive to the ambivalent feelings civilian populations have towards their home country. One of the ways in which the memoir's polysemous title reverberates is that *War Child* has the ambition of being an updated, twenty-first century version of South Sudan as a nation whose people are unhomed, a nation whose people are gripped with what Anthony Vidler calls "spatial fear" and "paralysis of movement" stemming from "the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not so, from the *Heimlich* … into the *unheimlich*" (Vidler 6). From the perspective of Homi Bhabha's notion of the unhomely not as a state of lacking a home, but rather "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" that "creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself … in a state of 'incredulous terror'" ("World" 141), and Vidler's extension of the uncanny as "a special case of the many modern diseases, from phobias to neuroses, variously described … as a distancing from reality forced by reality" (*Architectural* 6), it could be argued that, by evoking scenes of religious and ethnic/racial tensions wherein many people either lose their lives or flee their natal homes, Jal imagines Sudan as *unhomely*.

Taking these unhomely notions into account, the terminology chosen for the study of Jal's memoir is that of liminal identities since *War Child* also figures liminality as the main characteristic of the postcolonial Sudanese nation. In her insightful study *Modernism and Charisma* (2013), Agnes Horvath constructs a set of useful lenses through which the term *liminal* can be considered. Riffing her ideas through Victor Turner, Horvath considers liminal situations as "periods of uncertainly, anguish, even existential fear; a facing of the abyss or the void" (*Modernism* 2) precisely because "the previously taken for-granted order of things is dissolved [and] everybody is paralysed with the opposite of power with weakness concerning what to do and is faced with anxiety about what is going to happen" (*Modernism* 3). In *War Child*, this characteristic is reflected both at individual and societal/national levels.

At various points, Jal's memoir grapples with the trope of the unhomely. On the verge of this trope, often announced by images of violence, Jal is able to narrate his own lived experience as that of someone who is caught in between home and loss of home. This is reflected in the opening paragraph of the book. As the story begins, Jal and his family are on the move, in the course of which the young Jal begins to feel the impact of the long journey: "My stomach felt empty as the truck crawled along. We'd been travelling since sunrise on a dusty road, and I wanted a taste of the *tahnia* hidden in a box beside me" (3). When a few paragraphs later Jal adds that "We'd left our home a few days before in a convoy of trucks and were going to stay with our grandmother in the south" (3), the reader is immediately curious, wanting to know if Jal, his mother, uncle, aunt and siblings are making this journey out of their own will. As we read on, we learn that Jal's family is actually fleeing the political tensions in the north, which soon escalate into a full-blown civil war that renders so many people homeless. I thus argue that right from the beginning, Jal's memoir foregrounds the unhomely or uncanny nature of the postcolonial Sudanese state, wrought by repression through which we see the fugitive mobility of civilians either within Sudan or outside it. They are, both literally and metaphorically, displaced and feel uneasy identifying with Sudan as place they could call home. It makes sense, then, to read my conception of Jal's liminality as that of Sudan in miniature. Like Jal, South Sudan is a nation-in-the-making, caught between a fully-fledged postcolonial African state that all Sudanese can proudly call home and a state that is struggling to shake off arguably one of the longest civil conflict in the world.

3.5. Conclusion: Child Soldiers Perpetually Floating 'Betwixt and Between'

Drawing on the views of Arnold van Gennep, the British social anthropologist Mary Douglas makes a strong case for the danger surrounding liminal personae. Her 1966 publication, *Purity and Danger*, stands out as one of the most comprehensive studies of how cultures define themselves through their rituals of purity. In the book, Douglas observes that societies often have a troubling and deep-seated angst towards what she calls "persons in a marginal state" (96). Douglas' fear is that "danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable" (*Purity* 96). For Douglas, then, society's fear for "initiands" stems from their liminality, for "to have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power" (*Purity* 98) and vulnerability, hence uncanny. Although Douglas seems to use liminality and marginality interchangeably – which Thomassen finds problematic[45] – her core argument remains true, that society tends to be wary of child soldiers: "all precaution against danger must come from others [towards] a person [who] has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being" (*Purity* 98). Against this backdrop, it is possible to also understand the reception and integration of former child soldiers back into society as, also, problematic. On one hand, there is society's "[d]istrust and fear for child soldiers (Özerdem and Podder 312), which leads to "animosity, exclusion and labelling" (Podder 149). This is out of suspicion that as people who have been on the battlefield, these children may have committed grave atrocities; on the other, the child soldiers themselves think they can no longer return to the pre-war normality of childhood. This is exemplified in Keitetsi's interview with Michael Kiernan, where she relates:

> [I]n Africa, as you are a kid you have to respect everyone in the community who is older than you. But, being a soldier, to have killed, to have been raped, to have been promoted, to having given orders, going back to your community is nearly impossible. You need to have someone to help you in the process because there is no respect of the village people who are older than you. ("Child Soldiers" 33)

The persistent perception of former child soldiers as 'kids' as reported by Keitetsi here recalls Edgar Nabutanyi's observation that "in most African societies; childhood is a state of being rather than a state of becoming. This is because the label 'childhood' has multiple meanings

[45] In his insightful study *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (2014), anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen warns against the "widespread but highly problematic usage of … liminality as synonymous with 'marginality': to simply posit 'liminal subjects' as those who are marginalized and socially excluded" (7) Thomassen argues that "w]hile liminality and marginality share affinities (being boundary-concepts), they are also very different terms: that which is interstitial is neither marginal nor on the outside; liminality refers, quite literally, to something placed in an in-between position" (7-8).

depending on the speaker and the subject" ("Representations" 8). In attempts to measure themselves up to the status of adults, child soldiers think they are adults and, therefore, it is "nearly impossible" for them to go back to communities that still regard them as children. I find Keitetsi's remarks as suggestive in providing an interesting reflection on the challenges facing returning, former child soldiers: their "need to have someone to help [them] in the [re-integration] process" as they go back to societies that still look at them with "no respect." Such anxieties are reflected in all the texts examined in this chapter, where the child soldier focalisers talk of finding it difficult to "simply go back to playing the same games with the same children" on the streets (Mehari 100), or "fit into this community" (Keitetsi 123).

The issues raised in the foregoing discussion reflect debates and discourses which intersect the rather complex and long-drawn processes involved in the post-war reintegration of former child soldiers. In the three texts, Keitetsi, Mehari and Jal seem to suggest that identity (re)construction and belonging are some of the post-conflict challenges that former child soldiers face in their daily lives. Flowing from this understanding, I locate the child soldiers' post-conflict experiences within the broader continuum of being liminal identities. I hold that there is need to further interrogate this in-betweenness, because former child soldiers suffer the most from deep emotional and psychological traumas. After the conflict is over, they are, according to Radio Netherlands, still "reviled by their families and communities [and] traumatised by the memories of the atrocities they committed" (qtd. in Singer 115). Peter Singer opines that this is the case because most of them "will have undergone and/or carried out shocking and disturbing events of terrible violence" when they were in the battlefield, and that since "they are young, the effect on their psyche is magnified, as the violence takes place during the period when personalities are being developed" (*Children* 194).

A trait shared by former child soldiers, then, is that they persistently suffer from a psychogenic condition known as post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a PTSD is a potentially serious debilitating condition that usually occurs in people who have experienced or witnessed a natural disaster, an accident, war, or any other life-threatening events. Such people often have flashbacks, nightmares or recurrent and intrusive memories of the traumatising event. This is what Raymond Scurfield and Katherine Platoni also seem to suggest in "Myths and Realities about War, its Impact, and Healing" (2013) in their observation that "trauma survivors continue to experience profound psychological pain and turmoil years and decades later that

are intimately connected to earlier life trauma – and oftentimes in spite of having received years of counselling and other treatments" ("Myths" 17). Underpinning this observation is what Scurfield and Platoni call the unforgettability of war trauma ("Myths" 22). This is also exemplified in all the three texts under study in this chapter. Over twenty years after he escaped the warfront, Jal still complains of insomnia, nose-bleeding, migraines, backaches and pain all over his body. "If I happen to have slept for one hour," Jal confessed to his host on QTV in 2009, "then dreams or nightmares attack me. The only moment that I have slept is when I have a dream" ("Emmanuel Jal," at 12:29-13:19). Likewise, Mehari lives with "haunting memories" (211) that leave her "paralyzed with pain" (215) especially when it comes to her memories of sexual abuse, despite her earlier admissions (in the preface to *Heart of Fire*) that writing the memoir had helped her find peace. Keitetsi, on her part, complains of being haunted by the brutalities of rape over twenty years after she left Uganda. These confessions are not a new phenomenon in trauma studies. In fact, they are examples of delayed physical and existential reactions to trauma.

Considering Scurfield and Platoni's observations, it is this unforgettability of trauma that could be said to endure in child soldier narratives, which I read as challenging the healing discourse that some scholars and humanitarian organisations advocate. I thus propose that healing discourses are only temporary measures that could help trauma survivors alleviate the pain suffered. As Scurfield and Platoni also remind us, whatever healing mechanisms that are put in place to help trauma survivors "are [only] dysfunctional adaptations that can occur … to ease the pain as a temporary way to forget." Otherwise, "most trauma survivors remember aspects of the trauma forever" ("Myths" 22). I find Scurfield and Platoni's observations useful and extend them in my critique of the rehabilitation and reintegration paradigm, where it is mostly assumed that rehabilitation and reintegration are indispensable to the complete recovery of former child soldiers. In my view, such debates tend to ignore the fact that trauma is a wound, a persistent and oftentimes indelible scar that stays on to haunt its victim/s again and again, as I observe in Chapter Two of this study.

Chapter Four

Nationalism, Agency and Gendered Experiences[46] of Trauma

4.1. Introduction

> Syntactically, the epithet 'father' cannot be used interchangeably with that of 'mother'; so, too, the meanings that collect around the mother metaphor when applied to lands, languages and other national entities are incommensurate with the idea of the father. The image of the mother invites connotations of origin – birth, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical cord – and rests upon the frequent, and some might say 'natural', identification of the mother with the beloved earth, the national territory and the first-spoken language, the national tongue. In contrast the term fatherland has conventionally lent itself to contexts perhaps more strenuously nationalistic, where the appeal is to … filial duty, the bonds of fraternity and paternity – Boehmer, *Stories of Women*

I situate this chapter within literary discourse on representations of women in postcolonial wartime narratives by female writers. An important assumption drives this chapter, namely, that women are largely absent from discussions on the interventions they can make to help fight social injustice, even though violence and resistance (to injustice) are mostly mediated through images of women (and their bodies). This is what Grace Musila also seems to mean in her observation that a woman's "body is often absent from discussions on dismantling oppressive structures; the irony here being in the way the body, which is often the experiential site of both oppression and acts of resistance, has its experiences elided in discourses attempting to emancipate it" ("Embodying" 50). This exclusion is contingent on a gendered configuration of the nation. Here, the metaphor of nation-as-woman is (wrongly) used by patriarchy as justification to consign women to the role of nurture. Women thus end up being associated with what V. Spike Peterson describes as the five gender-differentiated ways in which they are situated in relation to nationalist processes: as biological reproducers of group members; as social reproducers of group members and cultural forms; as signifiers of group differences; as participants in political identity struggles; and as societal members generally" ("Gendered" 43-46). In this chapter, I suggest that Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010), Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (2014) and Halima Bashir's *Tears of the Desert* (2009) address themselves to these concerns with women in

[46] Unless stated otherwise, my use of the term 'gendered experiences' in this chapter is largely in reference to women's experiences.

nationalist processes. Central to the chapter's focus, then, is Boehmer's reminder that "literary texts … are central vehicles in the imaginative construction of new nations, and that gender plays a central formative role in that construction" (*Stories* 14, 22). Specifically, I explore how the selected texts portray both the psychological and physical trauma experienced by women, which seems to confirm that they are the most endangered human beings.[47] I also examine how "[their] lived experiences as played out by, and on their bodies, are central in shaping the choices they make and their exercise of agency" (Musila, "Embodying" 49) in the nation-project. Against this gynocentric approach, I argue that the ambiguous and less visible trauma men experience in the societies depicted in the texts is essential to understanding how war shapes relations between women and men. Thus although a reading of the selected texts overwhelmingly centres on women's lives, I propose that an understanding of men's lives within the same gendered imaginings of the nation state helps to illuminate the texts' tangled representation of gendered experiences of trauma.

The terms agency and gendered experiences of trauma cut across the chapter, in its focus on the embodied experiences of women in nationalist processes. The debate in this chapter is modelled after Bronwyn Davies' engaging schema of humanist and poststructuralist models of agency. In *A Body of Writing, 1990-1999* (2000), Davies describes the humanist framework of agency as being "synonymous with being a person." In her view, this form of agency "is used interchangeably with such concepts as freedom, autonomy, rationality and moral authority" (55). Under this model, then, agency is understood to mean that "each person is one who has an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognizable identity, who 'speaks for themselves' and who accepts responsibility for their actions. Such responsibility is understood as resting on a moral base and entailing personal commitment to the moral position implied in their choices" (56). This view is different from a poststructuralist framework where agency is synonymous with *authority*. Davies clarifies her position, insisting that this is "not authority in the sense of the one who claims and enforces knowledges, dictating to others what is 'really' the case, but as a speaker who mobilises existing discourses in new ways, inventing and breaking old patterns" (66). She believes that an agent, in this case, is "someone who [is] able to speak with *authority* … derived [not] from their personal individual qualities, but [from] a discursive positioning that they and others sometimes [have] had access to" (67). Davies further notes that

[47] By saying this, I by no chance imply that children and physically challenged groups fare better than women.

> Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of the self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert, and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. (*Body* 67)

Davies's schema is useful in my interrogation of how the writers in this chapter appropriate different forms of agency to subvert overt and covert androcentric perceptions of women in violent (nationalist) contexts. I argue that women in the selected texts are represented as perceiving, embracing and practicing the humanist model of agency because they know that it is a right for them as citizens of their respective countries. Each of the selected texts addresses women's lives in different ways, containing nuances that expand our understanding of gendered experiences of trauma. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, Mengiste adopts what I call the motif of the fearless female character not only to novelise trauma but also to create women who 'take action' against social injustice. Following this is an exploration of *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, which reflects the choices available for women and the decisions they take in violent contexts. Since time immemorial, women's bodies have been used as battlefields for male/masculine egos. This is what is reflected in my penultimate section on *Tears of the Desert*, where I discuss female bodies as being used as "the metanarrative terrain of the text, allowing the author to perform some of the challenges associated with living in a female body" (Murray 76) in a violent context.

4.2. Beyond Reproductive Roles: Agency in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*

Maaza Mengiste was born in Ethiopia in 1971. Her family fled to Nigeria when she was barely four years old, following the authoritarian rule instituted by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (whose Amharic equivalent is Dergue or Derg [Toggia 266]).[48] Mengiste has written two novels so far: *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (2010) and *The Shadow King* (forthcoming). *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* is a fictional reconstruction of the collapse of two of Ethiopia's regimes: the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie and the subsequent socialist military junta called the Derg, led by Mengistu Haile-Mariam. The book opens with

[48] In the words of J. Stephen, Morrison the Derg began as "a military mutiny … in early 1974 [which] resulted by September of that year in the overthrow of Haile Selassie" ("Ethiopia" 126). It was initially composed of several military officers who overthrew the monarch of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), following what Pietro Toggia calls "the *yekatit* revolution": an inchoate urban popular uprising against autocracy and all forms of repressive rule demanding a new democratic order (265-66). Led by Mengistu Haile-Mariam, the Dergue promised to end the misery in the land, only for them to commit the very atrocities they deplored.

a hospital scene where we meet Hailu, a senior surgeon operating on a boy who has just been shot by the police during a student-led protest against the Emperor. Part of the narrative revolves around Dawit, Hailu's son who gets involved in the protests, first against the monarchy and, later, the Derg's heavy-handedness. The villain of the novel is Mickey, Dawit's childhood friend who had once lived with the Hailu family after he had lost his own father to starvation and exhaustion during the reign of Haile Selassie. Mickey finally moves out of the Hailu family, joins the Derg and eventually rises to the top ranks of the now oppressive military junta. Mickey's decision to join the Derg puts him on the opposing side to Dawit's cause. Towards the end of the novel Mickey is killed by Dawit in an ambush. The novel ends with a scene where Hailu supports his family in its fight against the Derg. Hailu's support only comes after he is tortured in prison for committing a mercy killing of the unnamed Colonel's daughter, one of the regime's 'special prisoners.'

The novel follows a cyclical violence of trauma, marked by a constant tension that spans across three social upheavals in Ethiopian history: the urban protests against the repressive monarch of Emperor Haile Selassie, the violent Derg revolution, and the counter-Derg insurgency in its wake. I focus my reading not on the fictional reconstruction of this traumatic history, but on the ways in which female experiences of and resistance to revolutionary terror during the Derg regime are imagined in the narrative. Mengiste does not explicitly write women's lives the way Nadifa Mohamed and Halima Bashir do (as I explain later in the chapter), though she nonetheless clearly responds to how political violence shapes the lives of women by engaging with notions of agency at a more sustained level. She also imagines a social and historical narrative that calls into question the status of women, most notably within Ethiopia's last two autocratic regimes.

Throughout the novel, there is tension between what men do to protect their country from further violation and what the women themselves must do so that the young do not grow up thinking that they – the women – did nothing to help, as Sara observes in the novel.[49] I propose that Sara's observations are born of necessity and not choice: she, like most women, is aware that she is born in a misogynistic community where everyone thinks she is incapable of doing anything noteworthy: she "is a housewife, and in [society's] eyes, a simple woman"

[49] Maaza Mengiste, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* (Vintage Books, 2010), p. 234. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

(208). Thus, Sara falls into what Anne McClintock suggests is a descriptive category of women who are "excluded from direct action as … citizens, [and] are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphorical limit" (*Imperial* 354). In McClintock's view, women "are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (*Imperial* 354). The challenge McClintock's insight presents here is twofold. She seems to problematize the incongruity society seems to draw concerning someone who is the embodiment of nation yet she is overlooked when it comes to participating in events that could help propel it (and herself) forward. At the same time, she challenges us to look beyond the limited scope of society's perception of women.

Writing on the gendered configuration of the postcolonial nation in *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (2005), Elleke Boehmer notes that "the nation is informed throughout by gendered history, by the normative masculinities and femininities that have shaped its growth over time" (3). Specifically, the idea of the nation is "embodied *as* woman *by* male leaders, artists and writers" (*Stories* 4; original emphases). In other words, the nation is constructed as inscribing specific symbolic roles for women which, as Boehmer observes, does not seem to go beyond "birth, hearth, home, roots" (27). Nationalism itself is viewed by Boehmer as "a masculine *family drama* in the operation of its iconographies and spectacles of power" (28; original emphasis). Mengiste's novel challenges this, specifically in the ways it enters the nationalist realm to explore women's participation in the narration of nation and national belonging. Mengiste envisions female agency through her portrayal of female characters who actively participate in national movements, which problematizes the notion that women cannot engage nationalist and feminist politics. Mengiste thus invites us to invent what Musila describes as "a whole new grammar of women's experiences of oppression, conceptualizations of resistance, and enactments of agency" ("Embodying" 50). A sustained form of resistance is performed in the novel through the characters of the unnamed Colonel's daughter and Sara.

With the unnamed Colonel's daughter, Mengiste could be said to be expressing the exhaustion and disillusionment of youths with military regimes. A student in the university, the unnamed Colonel's daughter briefly appears in the novel as a protestor and supporter of the Revolutionary Lion Resistance movement whose aim is to frustrate the Derg's Marxist-oriented policies, illustrated by the fact that it uses students and children to distribute counter-

revolutionary pamphlets among the masses. When the Colonel learns of his daughter's involvement, however, he has her arrested with the intention of "want[ing] to scare her, [to] teach her a lesson" (276). But then she gets "into wrong hands" of Girma, the character acknowledged by the Colonel himself as "that butcher" (252) because of the horrifying way he usually tortures his victims. In both the novel and in history, Girma was responsible for the torture of so many innocent civilians during the reign of the Derg in Ethiopia. His full name was Girma Kebede, one of "the psychopathic assassins" (Tareke 196) who is on record to have "killed people in Arat Kilo like flies" (Tegegn 255). In history, Girma "was the one who summarily executed the eight months pregnant Daro Negash" (Tegegn 255), a historical figure also mentioned in the novel (234). Girma was feared among his own fellow torturers, and "was himself executed by the Derg for being a member of *Meisone*[50] and for being too excessive in his killing sprees" (Tegegn 255).

The Derg's torture tactics to ensure that every citizen submits to its socialist policies is symbolised in Girma's torture of the unnamed Colonel's daughter, and in the Colonel's "ruthlessness with prisoners of war" and "his terrifying, methodical means of torture and murder" (248). These torture techniques recall Mbembe's analysis of "the ways state power *creates* … its own world of meanings [and] attempts to institutionalize this world of meanings as a 'socio-historical world' … turning it into a part of the people's 'common sense' [and] integrating it into the period's consciousness" (*Postcolony* 103; original emphasis). Drawing on Bakhtin's ideas of the obscene and the grotesque, Mbembe notes how the postcolony denies personhood to its subjects through state ideology of normative identities and censorship on expressions of individuality. In addition, it oppresses its citizens in the following ways: creating a permanent atmosphere of fear, improvisation, discontinuity, surreality, absurdity and simulacra. The postcolonial subject thus feels threatened by the postcolony's "unusual and grotesque art of representation [where critics are publicly tortured or executed], its taste for the theatrical, and its violent pursuit of wrongdoing to the point of shamelessness" (*Postcolony* 115).

[50] According to Gebru Tareke, *Meisone* (or Meison) was an Amharic acronym for the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement. It was a by-product of "the international Ethiopian student movement of the 1960s," and it "surfaced in Addis Ababa soon after the political upheaval" hoping to capture power by removing Mengistu and the Derg (189-180; see also Tegegn 250).

In Mohamed's novel, the unnamed Colonel's daughter's torture at the hands of Girma is gruesomely captured by Hailu, who describes her as someone who "was brought [to hospital] in a plastic bag" after "she'd been raped" and had "the bottoms of her feet … burned, then whipped" by her torturers (252, 250). Notwithstanding its political significance, as one of the particularly potent forms of torture and abuse for women suspected of supporting the nationalist cause, there is little engagement with the socio-cultural discourse surrounding her violent rape. Both Yunusy Ng'umbi (in "Politics of the Family in Contemporary East and West African Women's Writing") and Ken Junior Lipenga (in "Narrative Enablement: Constructions of Disability in Contemporary African Imaginaries") allude to culpability as the reason why the Colonel decides to commit suicide (since he is the one who sanctioned his daughter's arrest and torture). Ng'umbi qualifies this by asserting that the Colonel "cannot withstand the shame for bearing a hand in the killing of his daughter" ("Politics" 182). The deaths of both father and daughter, Ng'umbi observes, "communicate the disintegration of the family and the nation" ("Politics" 182). Ng'umbi is not clear on how the Colonel's daughter's rape leads to the fragmentation of the nation in the novel, but the implication here is that men's pride is hurt when 'their' women are raped. Therefore, they decide to fight the rapist or opponent (to protect their honour). In extreme circumstances, they either kill the raped victim or even themselves. Noting the conventional understanding of 'shame' as implying ignominy, coupled with the fact that the Colonel lives in a society that views rape of women as "the ultimate humiliation, a sexual coup de grace" (Brownmiller, *Against* (38), another plausible reason why he commits suicide could thus be that he does not want to live with the humiliation of knowing that he is the one who facilitated the rape by sanctioning his daughter's arrest and torture in the first place. Neither does he want to suffer the humiliation of being a father of a rape victim. But what is clear is that in the brief moments she appears in the novel, the unnamed Colonel's daughter symbolises resistance to state power.

Before she is drawn into the revolution, Sara leads what Diana Meyers describes as the life of "the traditional woman," one who "has been assiduously groomed for the feminine role" and devotes herself primarily to "fulfilling her duties as housewife and mother" usually at the expense of her own desires (623-24). Christine Matzke views Sara as "a seemingly plain and insignificant housewife" (94), while Lipenga sees her as "a minor character" (91). But as violence escalates, Sara "becomes Dawit's most trusted ally in the underground struggle against the Derg. Together they retrieve the bodies of so-called 'traitors' left to rot in the streets, returning them to their families for secret burials and thus restoring their dignity"

(Matzke 94). Mengiste portrays Sara as a determined woman, especially after bodies of 'traitors' begin to pile in the streets. This is reinforced by Mengiste herself in an interview she granted to Z'étoile Imma, where she explains that the Derg's tactic of "leaving out the bodies on the streets was a way to frighten the students, or anyone who wanted to resist against the government. It was a warning sign." Collecting the bodies, on the other hand, "was a form of resisting repression that didn't entail picking up a gun and shooting someone." ("Emerging" par. 32)

Once Sara embarks on this course, we see her getting more and more emboldened such that she begins to encourage fellow women to take part: "I don't want [the young] growing up thinking we didn't fight back" (234), she challenges. Accordingly, her assertiveness and her new role lead us to conclude that she is both revolutionary and empathetic. Her declaration that she is "not going to wait patiently while people are dying" and that "If we don't do something, we have to suffer for their wrongs for generations" (235) further seems to enhance her activism and role in the movement. Her refusal to keep quiet while things are getting out of hand is significant in this respect. In response to Emama Seble's entreaties to "stay alive" (by not joining the revolution), she asks "How can we do nothing?'" (234). While the older woman thinks that "there's no need to fight" as "it won't make [Sara] more Ethiopian" than she already is (235), Sara reminds Emama Seble that she comes from a family of fighters: "My mother fought in battles, my father almost died in one. *It's the way I was raised*" (234; my emphasis). Most important of all, she challenges Emama Seble's suggestion that society should hope for the best because she knows that evil can only be driven away if one acts: "It's not just enough to pray" (235). Seen in this light, it is unsurprising that her militancy and courage puts her "so close to so much danger" (280).

From the above analysis, Sara's response to the Derg regime destabilises Fanon's prescient views about women and revolutions. Focusing on the Algerian revolution, Fanon writes in *A Dying Colonialism* (1965) that most militants at first doubted if women had the mental strength to make them excel. McClintock is of the view that Fanon "does not consider the possibility of women committing themselves to action" (*Imperial* 366) or "to penetrate the flesh of the 'revolution'" (*Imperial* 367). Contrary to this notion, it is Sara, not Yonas her husband, who, by the novel's end, challenges the two soldiers when they come looking for Dawit at their house. It is she, not Dawit (who is portrayed as hiding under a table and shaking with fear, despite his own rhetoric about fighting for the traduced of society [298])

that 'kills fear' with courage by deriding the two soldiers and calling one of them a "bastard" and a "foolish boy" for siding with the Russians to terrorise his own people (298, 299). And in a final twist of events, it is Sara who "wrapped an arm around [the soldier's] neck" while her daughter, Tizita, "grasped the back of his shirt" (299-300) for Yonas to finish him off. Sara is here refusing to be categorised as just another woman insofar as she recognises that fighting social injustice requires a concerted effort from both men and women.

In *The Morality of Freedom* (1986), Joseph Raz advances what I consider to be a humanistic understanding of agency. He construes agency in terms of freedom or "personal autonomy," that is, "the vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives" (*Morality* 369). Raz proposes three constitutive elements of what he calls the characteristics of agency: having the mental capability to make rational choices, being free from social stigmatization and, lastly, being free from all forms of manipulation or coercion. For Raz, "a person whose every decision is extracted from him by coercion is not an autonomous person. Nor is a person autonomous if he is paralysed and therefore cannot take advantage of the options which are offered to him" (*Morality* 373). Similar sentiments are shared by Diana Meyers, who insists that agency has something to do with conduct or competencies that may not have been recognised as agency in the past (qtd. in Abrams 806). I read Sara's activism as reflecting this humanistic discourse of agency. Her decision to go out and find the mothers of the dead suggests that she is able to make rational decisions about what else she needs to do so that the bereaved are not continually traumatised with the thought of waiting for the return of their loved ones. Similarly, her refusal to be swayed by Emama Seble's reasoning suggests that she is above manipulation and coercion from the older woman.

In this respect, Norman Long's analysis of agency as a form of power is a remarkable illustration of the female characters' actions in the novel. Long suggests that "the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion (16). Agency as constructed here alerts us to look at ways in which someone can intervene in a situation. Many of the individual acts that seek to disrupt dominant discourses in the novel occur in the realm of 'taking action' to change the course of events. It seems that by the time we come to the last chapter of the novel, even young girls like Tizita (Sara's daughter) become consciously aware of this unwritten rule that things will only change when everyone

regardless of their sex is involved in fighting social injustice. The fact that Mengiste's narrative concludes with the diegetic perspective of a young girl is, for me, another way of bringing the young into the revolution. Most importantly, the inclusion of Tizita's perspective and 'action' (she is the one who "grasped the back of [the soldier's] shirt" and who shouted: "Daddy, I'm holding him for you!" [299-300]) symbolically introduces her as a new female 'fighter' against social injustice. Tizita's awareness that things change only if people commit themselves to 'action' is competently handled by Nadifa Mohamed's novel (discussed below), where I read new constructions of womanhood in post-war Somalia.

4.3. Women's Individual Trauma and Loss: Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

A brief overview of Somalia will prove useful to understanding the issues depicted in Nadifa Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls* in this chapter and Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (in Chapter Five). Somalia has had a complex history. According to Hassan Mohamed, it stands out as the only African country that was partitioned into five separate parts during the colonial period: British Somaliland in the north; North Frontier District (NFD, which was later ceded to Kenya by Britain); Italian Somaliland in the south; French Somaliland (now Djibouti); and a large region known as Ogaden which all three European powers relinquished portions of to Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia as a reward for his collaboration ("Refugee" 7). Out of these five parts, only two parts of the Somali nation – the former British Somaliland and former Italian Somaliland – gained independence and united, on 1 July 1960, to form what came to be known as the Somali Democratic Republic. These views are also corroborated by Nadifa Mohamed, who adds that the division of Somalia into five parts became the source of conflict first between Somalis and the neighbouring countries and, later, among the Somalis themselves.[51] The Somali Civil War was born out of these and other internal conflicts. It started on 9 April 1978, when a coup attempt was made by disaffected Majeerteen officers. One such Majeerteen-based opposition movement – the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) – was created soon after the coup attempt. It started launching armed attacks against Barre's regime. More armed opposition groups followed. On 9 April 1981, the Somali National Movement (SNM) was formed, while the United Somali Congress (USC) and the Somali Peoples Movement (SPM) were founded in 1989. These parties formed a united front against the Barre regime in August 1990. Barre was finally forced to abdicate the presidency when USC forces captured Mogadishu on 26 January 1991

[51] Nadifa Mohamed, *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), p. 12. All page references are based on this text, and will appear parenthetically in this study.

(Gardner and El Bushra 230, 232). Since Barre's ousting from power, competing factions continue to fight for supremacy, leaving millions of people dying and thousands fleeing the country every year.

Nadifa Mohamed was born in 1981 in Hargeisa, Somalia, to a Somali father and a British mother. In 1986 her family relocated to London, where she acquired all her educational qualifications. She went to St Hilda's College, Oxford, to study history and politics. Mohamed has written two novels: *Black Mamba Boy* and *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. *The Orchard of Lost Souls* picks up on the tail end of General Mohamed Siad Barre's military dictatorship. Its historical setting is 1987, on the brink of Siad Barre's collapse, when rebel forces are closing in on the northern town of Hargeisa. The novel opens with a scene where people are being rounded up by the regime's neighbourhood watch – the *Guddi* – for the annual October 21 celebrations at a stadium. This rally is in honour of the military dictatorship's 18th anniversary. The novel focuses on three female protagonists: Kawsar, a rich but childless widow in her late 50s, Filsan, an Internal Security officer in her late twenties and Deqo, a nine-year old orphan born and raised in the Saba'ad refugee camp.[52] Deqo is in the stadium as part of a choreographed dance troupe of children ferried from the refugee camp about twenty miles away, and who have been promised a pair of shoes as their reward for dancing at the parade. Owing to nervousness, Deqo forgets her dance steps, wets herself, and is dragged aside to be beaten by women of the *Guddi*. Kawsar watches the whole incident from the nearby arena. When she attempts to save Deqo from the beating,[53] she is arrested by Filsan who then savagely beats her and breaks her hip. Somalia descends into violence soon after the celebrations, with the rebels launching an offensive against government forces to oust Siad Barre from power. Towards the end of the novel, when the nation is "bleeding dry" (a euphemism used to refer to the violent carnage that rocks Somalia in the novel), the paths of Kawsar, Filsan and Deqo cross again when they take refuge in

[52] The Saba'ad refugee camp was created in 1978 to accommodate refugees, most of them ethnic Somalis, who were running away from the disputed region of Ogaden in Ethiopia. A year earlier, in 1977, Somali forces had gone to war with Ethiopia, claiming that the Ogaden region belonged to Somalia. (Gardner and El Bushra 230)

[53] Kawsar comes to the rescue of young Deqo both out of empathy and because she lost her own child to a similar malpractice. Five years earlier, security forces had arrested Hodan, her only surviving child after a series of miscarriages, in the mistaken belief that she had participated in a nonviolent protest alongside other students. Hodan was eventually released, but not before she was violated and tortured so severely that she became irreparably traumatised. Shortly after the incident, Hodan committed suicide. Kawsar is thus embittered by the repressive regime, as she blames it for the death of her daughter.

Kawsar's house off October Road in Guryo Samo area. Before long, the three women embark on a long trek out of Hargeisa to the Saba'ad, escaping the ravages of the civil war.

Two narrative tapestries are embedded in Mohamed's novel: the public – the narrative capturing the (historical) devastation wrought on Somalia by the civil war, and the revolution in its wake – and the private: a story of individual trauma and loss in which the three female protagonists decide to take the path of resistance by standing up for their rights and, eventually, walking away from the violence that has causes them so much pain. Each of these stories is connected by the dimension of a set of experiences which mark, define and shape individualities of the three female protagonists. Structured in three parts, the novel introduces Deqo, Kawsar and Filsan in Part One, telling the reader what brings the three together: the annual October 21 celebrations. Part Two dedicates a section to each of the three women, in which we see them watch the Somali state's descent into war and revolutionary violence. We are also let into their personal lives, their embodied experiences and, most reunites brings the three women once more, this time not as people pursuing individual goals but as forging a common front. In both contexts, the subaltern female voice seeks to assert itself and claim authority over the social ills women see happen around, and to, them.

Mohamed's novel, set at a very particular moment in Somali history, deals with the catastrophic events that happened in the northern part of Somalia when government forces went to war with the Isaaq (or Isaak) clan, the largest in the region. Isaak exiles living in London had created an anti-government guerrilla organisation in 1981, the Somali National Movement (SNM) – called the National Freedom Movement in the novel – with the aim of ousting Siad Barre from power. The novel's focus, however, is not on the civil war but on the women's lives as they try to cope with the devastating impact of war. As Magnus Taylor observes, "rather than becoming a story of the war, the book becomes a study of what goes on in the minds of these [female] characters" (par. 7). "Apart from a brief description of the fighting experienced by Filsan towards the end of the book," Taylor maintains, "Mohamed seems to deliberately eschew the potentially dramatic episodes in the war" (par. 8). This component of the lives and experiences of women is essential to understanding their choices, because, as the novel's omniscient narrator says, they are the ones "running their families because the streets have been emptied of men; those not working abroad are in prison or have been grabbed off the street and conscripted into the army." (147)

To the extent that the novel portrays the scarred hearts of the three female protagonists, the individual stories they tell and the choices they make need to be put in context. I read Kawsar as representing the voice of reason and protector of the young and vulnerable still living in Somalia. At almost sixty years of age, she is depicted as someone who has lived long enough to know the regime's brutality in dealing with its critics. My argument is influenced by how she reacts towards the regime. While attending an enforced pro-government rally, for example, she defiantly refuses to hold up a placard bearing "a shimmering portrait of Oodweyne" (17) – Mohamed's fictional reference to Siad Barre – because she thinks he is "a blasphemer" and someone who has brought more pain than gain to the lives of ordinary Somalis. This pain is all too fresh in Kawsar's life, having lost both her husband and daughter to the regime (through arrest and torture, as I explain in detail below). Earlier in the day, when she saw General Haaruun ("the Military-Governor of the north-western region" who stands in as "the President's avatar in Hargeisa" [7]), her heart pounded in her chest when she came face to face with the person whom she blamed "not just for [her daughter] Hodan's passing but for [Hodan's] arrest, her disappearance and her decline into a huddled, diminished figure" (14). Thus, seeing Haaruun and the President's effigy together draws instant revulsion in Kawsar: "Before she remembers where she is, she spits violently at the sight, drawing a gasp from the spectators around her" (17-18). Kawsar fails to control herself upon seeing the portrait and her reaction, though dangerous (given the ruthlessness of the regime), is understandable. Her actions draw gasps from the spectators, who probably fear for her life. But Kawsar finds their fear "so paltry and pointless in comparison to what she has lived through" (18). She asks: "What more can they [the regime] hold when they have taken away her only child?" (18). Hence her act of defiance towards authority in the opening passages of the book – which allows Deqo to escape from the women of the *Guddi* – begins to make sense to the reader: she "does not care about her life or possessions to keep abasing herself" (18) at the hands of a regime that holds no hope for the ordinary Somali.

For Kawsar, the 'new' Somalia she lives in is a far cry from the old. What is more, it is a poignant and disturbing place as compared to the Somalia of 1960. Strapped to her bed while fighting rages outside her house (she can neither walk nor sit upright, after she is disabled following Filsan's savage beating), she fills us in on how everything has changed from "the good times … once shared" (11) by all Somalis *then* to *now* when anniversary celebrations are only "poor imitations of the Independence Day celebrations" (11) of earlier days:

> When the British had left on 26 June 1960, everyone had poured out of their homes in their Eid clothes and gathered at the municipal *khayriyo* between the national bank and prison. It was as if they were drunk, wild; girls got pregnant that night and when asked who the father of their child was, they would reply: 'Ask the flag.' That night, crushed within a mixed crowd as the Somali flag was raised for the first time, Kawsar had lost a long, gold earring that was part of her dowry, but Farah hadn't cared – he'd said it was a gift to the new nation. The party had moved to Freedom Park and lasted into the next morning, the sleepy town transformed into a playground, the youth of the country believing that they had achieved what their elders hadn't. (11)

The description of girls getting pregnant on Somalia's Independence Day as "the Somali flag [is] raised for the first time" resonates with Yvonne Vera's short story which also evokes the heady jubilation of Zimbabwe's coming of independence from Britain. Similar to what Mohamed captures above, Vera's story captures a man celebrating the lowering of the British flag on Independence Day "in style and triumph" (*Why* 29) by sleeping with a woman. Suggested in both cases is a premonition of the deployment of women's lives and bodies as battlegrounds for male nationalist pleasure, which, in war-time, translates to men's nationalist anger, articulated through the weaponization of rape against both the enemy-camp and the local women's bodies (I return to this in detail in the next section). Mohamed's description of women falling pregnant, albeit under the euphoria of independence, is, therefore, her enactment of the various and nuanced ways in which women are elided in nationalist discourses except where patriarchy wants to (ab)use them for its own selfish agendas. This is suggested in the novel through the new Somali regime's tactics of intimidation and fronting of women to "foreign dignitaries … to make it seem human" (5).

Turning to the second female protagonist, Filsan, I find Nadifa Mohamed's inclusion of the perspective of a ranked military officer intriguing as it allows one to examine the ways in which notions of power play out in the novel, both within the military and between Filsan and the wider Somali society. In "Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing 'Us' versus 'Them'" (1998), Peterson interrogates the phenomenon of women participants in struggles as one of the "ways in which women have typically been situated in relation to nationalist processes" ("Gendered" 43). In terms of women's contribution to nationalist processes, one of the most striking observations in Spike Peterson's essay is a gendered hierarchy in which women are continually denigrated. According to Spike Peterson,

> … women are not only symbols, and their activities extend well beyond the private sphere…. [W]omen have throughout history supported and participated in conflicts

> involving their communities. They have provided essential support in their servicing roles (feeding, clothing, and nursing combatants), worked in underground movements, passed information and weapons, organised their communities for military action, taken up arms themselves, and occasionally led troops into battle…. Yet the significance of their contributions remains 'hidden' and therefore unanalysed in conventional accounts.
> Women have historically been denied public sphere activities: they rarely appear in combatant or leadership roles and in the arena of high politics. (45; parentheses in original)

Filsan embodies Spike Peterson's thoughts in several ways. She is a Corporal working for Internal Security within the army. Originally from Mogadishu, she is seconded to Hargeisa to help quell anti-revolutionary protests there: she "volunteered to come north, hoping to show that although a woman, she has more commitment to the revolution than any of her male peers" (8). She sees Hargeisa as "the coalface of internal security, where real work can be done defeating National Freedom Movement bandits who persist in nipping at the government's tail" (8). While in Hargeisa, Filsan oversees three *Guddi* units, one of which is responsible for training children from the Saba'ad refugee camp in traditional dances to be performed at the forthcoming eighteenth anniversary celebrations (6). These national assignments become subject positions that grant her some form of 'power.' Being in the limelight also allows her to rub shoulders with top military officials and foreign dignitaries, including General Haaruun and the unnamed American attaché. Such spaces open Filsan's mind and lead her to begin to cultivate ambitions for more power. When the stadium events are over, for example, we see her casting "a competitive glance" at "two other female officers [standing] nearby" even when she knows that "she is the closest" to Haaruun, "hoping that the General will notice the sharpness of her uniform, the straightness of her back [and] the smartness of her salute" (28-29). Through these mental peregrinations, we begin to understand why she admits to have "studied and trained to take her place at the heart of things" (30), just as we are indulged in her equally wishful thinking that one day she will be "in the centre [of power], not as [Haaruun's] companion but as his successor, waving down to her subjects" (7). Beyond this fantasizing however, Filsan is not allowed to try out her ambitions. In fact, she becomes increasingly disillusioned with the way patriarchy treats her. She is constantly objectified by the men who "see nothing more than breasts and a hole" in her (34). Haaruun and the visiting American attaché are no exception to the rule, as exemplified in the following conversation:

> [Haaruun]: 'I bet you this girl could strip a Kalashnikov in a minute,' the General boasts, placing his gold-rimmed sunglasses on top of his bald head.
> 'Yes, and could annihilate an Ethiopian battalion while unicycling. I don't doubt it,' the American laughs.
> 'Look buddy …' General Haaruun grabs Filsan's hand and raises it before twirling her around. 'You're going to tell me that America women can be trained killers and still look good?'
> Filsan fixes her gaze to the floor; she can feel others looking her up and down, eyes flicking over her like tongues.
> 'Not bad, not bad. I wouldn't want to meet her down a dark alley. Or maybe I would if it was the right kind of alley.'
> General Haaruun clasps the attaché's shoulder and hoots his approval before recovering himself. 'Keep your capitalist hands to yourself.' He mock-wags his finger in his face. (33)

Both Haaruun and the American attaché fail to recognise and respect Filsan as a serious soldier with military ambitions and hopes for advancement based on her capabilities and leadership skills, choosing to focus on her gender and sex appeal instead. Haaruun parades Filsan around for everyone to see while the American nods approval. I, therefore, read the two men's treatment of Filsan as the objectification of the female body and a reinforcement of the rampant misogyny and sexism present in the narrative world of the novel. This is underscored in the novel through Haaruun who 'orders' Filsan to take off her hat in the back seat of his car (35) as they leave for the Oriental Hotel later in the day, an act I read as signalling Haaruun's extraterritorial jurisdiction over Filsan's body. Filsan meekly obeys. But when she resists him as he is about to rape her, Haaruun pushes her out of a barely stopped Mercedes. "*Abu kintiro*, you cunt, make your own way home" (37), he swears as his convoy pulls away. It is useful to consider Haaruun's treatment of Filsan as reflecting Sharon Marcus' concept of the "gendered grammar of violence." According to Marcus, this grammar

> predicates men as the objects of violence and the operators of its tools, and predicates women as the objects of violence and the subjects of fear. This grammar induces men who follow the rules set out for them to recognize their gendered selves in images and narratives of aggression in which they are agents of violence who either initiate violence or respond violently when threatened. ("Fighting" 393)

The violence perpetrated against Filsan by Haaruun is, therefore, aimed at reducing her into what Marcus describes as "the subject of fear" ("Fighting" 393). It also pushes her to a blind rage, however, in which she is portrayed as displacing her anger not on Haaruun (the man who ill-treats her) but on a fellow woman. Dwarfed by the men's stares on her body and by

Haaruun's debasing treatment, she begins to feel insignificant, and the male community in whose presence she thought she exuded power slowly turns her into an enraged vixen. She rushes to the police cell and takes her aggression out on Kawsar by beating and rendering the older woman bedridden for the rest of her life.

Unsurprisingly, as the Somali state finds itself at the intersection of Civil War and lawlessness, Filsan begins to question the ideals of the revolution and her place in it. All along she has lived under the illusion that she is part of nation building in the 'new' Somalia, believing that she is "a new kind of woman with the same abilities and opportunities as any man" (213). Her search for Kawsar back at the police cell and the beatings she inflicts on the older woman bring temporary respite to her, but with it even more pain at the realisation that she has been made to feel "so small and inconsequential" (213) by state/male power. We thus understand why, after she finishes landing savage blows on the older woman, she "shakes her head, tears in her own eyes, and rushes out of the room" (44). Filsan's sense of disappointment is magnified by the fact that "the thud of her boots as she runs down the corridor gets quieter and disappears" (44) with her retreating steps, which foreshadows her eventual abandonment of her beliefs about serving the regime for the 'good of Somalia.' I, therefore, read Filsan's abandonment of the nationalist ideals as suggesting two things. First, it is her way of resisting objectification at the hands of male power. Finally, it is a sign of frustration at her failed quest to become 'an honorary man,' so to speak; able to inflict violence on others, just like the men. Here she has learnt that no matter how well she serves the military, she will remain a woman in its eyes, and subject to its patriarchal violence.

In her portrayal of Deqo Mohamed gives an account of innocent Somalis caught in the crossfire of fratricidal violence, but "for whom politics seem meaningless" (Forna 11). Deqo is a child of war, "the bastard of a loose woman" (67) who had arrived in the Saba'ad refugee camp one day, bore and then abandoned her. Owing to this, Deqo learns very early in life that "she belong[s] to the wind and the tracks in the dirt rather than to any other person," and that "no watchful mother would come after her shouting her name in every direction" (67). This description foreshadows Deqo's wandering nature, especially after she is out on the streets of Hargeisa. The sentence "no watchful mother would come after her shouting her name in every direction" is particularly poignant, as it foreshadows the sense of isolation and vulnerability that will soon follow her. This unhomely upbringing forces Deqo to not only accept her fate but also learn how to look out for herself from a very tender age. After the

anniversary celebrations debacle, for example, she relocates to a barrel under a bridge as her new 'home,' from where she wanders into the farms along the ditch to "collect guavas, pomegranates, mangoes, bananas and papayas" which she then sells in the *faqir* market (54). We also learn that Deqo "has tried other jobs [before]: collecting scraps of *qat* to sell to the dealers, pulling grass to sell as goat feed to housewives, sweeping the main market when there aren't enough girls in the evening" (72). Her mode of dressing further accentuates the type of person she is. She is described as someone that "has grabbed all of her clothing from the wind: a white shirt caught on a thorn tree, a red dress tumbling abandoned by the roadside, cotton trousers thrown over a power line," and that "[s]he dresses in these items that ghosts have left behind and becomes an even greater ghost herself, unseen by passers-by, tripped over, stepped on" (56). Her next 'home' is a brothel, where she works as a maid and an errand girl to four prostitutes.[54] But the security she finds there is short-lived, especially after Nasra – the kind-hearted prostitute who had taken her in – 'sells' her to Mustafa as part of financing her own exit to start a new life elsewhere (113-116). Deqo soon finds herself out on the street again, this time in the middle of a war zone, from where she must find her way to safety. From sleeping in a ditch to staying in a brothel, and from being 'sold' to almost being raped, the impression we get is that of a doubly vulnerable child.

I would like to extend Deqo's sense of isolation and vulnerability, however, by exploring the ways in which her orphanhood could also be understood in its metaphorical sense. In "Postcolonial Dread and the Gothic: Refashioning Identity in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (2013), Robert Smart meditates on the troubling role that orphans play in life. Smart illustrates his point by using the example of the Gothic novel where, he argues, orphans "either arrive in the story unrooted in family and history or they become so as a result of mysterious deaths and disappearances" (13). Orphanhood, for Smart, then, becomes a troubling experience, an arduous task in which "the orphan is essentially a social cipher seeking a missing [or new] identity … through marriage or adoption" (14). A central argument that Smart seems to advance here, which is also found in Deqo's character,

[54] The four prostitutes in the novel are Nasra, China, Karl Marx and Stalin. Except Nasra, the other prostitutes do not bear their real names. China, we are told, who got her name because she "helps the men who build [roads]" (25), most of whom are "drunks and gangster types" (102); Karl Marx, in line with her eponymous name, services the poor and humble workers (102). Karl Marx admits to going into prostitution when she was Deqo's age (87). In her late thirties now, Karl Marx thinks she has "shared and shared and shared until there is nothing left to give" (88). Stalin is depicted as handling "the middle-aged husbands hiding their faces behind sunglasses" (102), while "the younger, smartly dressed men go to Nasra" (102).

is that the orphan character is rootless, always under threat: "the orphan character … is 'psychically bipolar' because s/he has no past, nothing from which to determine a current identity and no prospect for a future because of the orphan's misalignment with the familial structures" (14). I view Smart's illustration of the deprivations of the orphan, "[w]ith an origin from neither inside the family nor from outside it" (14), as indistinguishable from the Somalia portrayed by Mohamed in *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, with its history of violence and in-fighting that has led to scores of people wandering from place to place. I, therefore, read Mohamed's use of the orphan imagery in her novel as an embedded critique of the nation-project. Unlike the ostensibly pure nation which all citizens are called upon to defend patriotically, and render themselves subject to, Somalia, like Deqo, is an orphaned state in which its citizens seem to have been abandoned to their own fate. In this case, Deqo's character represents Mohammed's critique of the nationalism that underpins the violence of Somalia. In a way, her life mirrors the fate of independent Somalia and the various abuses and betrayals meted out to it by figures who should have protected and nurtured its freedom.

A striking feature that binds the three female protagonists, then, is that they are treated as second-class citizens, and Nadifa Mohamed's description of their experiences drives home the message of isolation, loss and trauma. In psychological terms, trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience, as well as the mental and emotional after-effects of that experience. Cathy Caruth looks at trauma as an "event [that] is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time [it occurred], but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" ("Introduction" 4-5; original emphasis). Caruth's designation of trauma as an *event* that is lived or re-experienced belatedly (a phenomenon that Freud calls latency) suggests ways in which past occurrences of trauma live out in a person's life. For Kawsar, these "past occurrences of trauma" appear incrementally in the novel, starting with the deaths of her husband and daughter, the miscarriages and stillbirths she has had in her life, the crippling beating from Filsan, and the fact that she is confined to her bed for a greater part of the novel's action while everyone is fleeing the violent carnage outside. But it is in the metaphor of the orchard that the growing sense of desolation and loss is best captured in the novel. In a broad sense, one could say that the novel deals with the theme of desolation as expressed through the orchard metaphor. Kawsar's house has an orchard whose trees "had been born from deaths" since they "grew from the remains of the children that had passed through her" (165). This description is significant in showing the extent to which Kawsar is affected by the

losses in her life. She is emotionally attached to the orchard, always thinking that if she doesn't tend to it she will be letting her 'children' down, just as picking fruits that fell from them will be "a kind of cannibalism" (165). In the end, we get the sense that Kawsar immortalises her loss through her imagination that the orchard symbolises her long gone family. But it is also possible to read Kawsar's orchard as functioning as a symbolic representation of the community: the desolation that surrounds Kawsar in her orchard is similar to the one that surrounds the northern city of Hargeisa. Her refusal to eat the fruits from the orchard, then, must be understood as a form of resistance to the violence of a state that eats its own children, through the killings that seem to go on unabated such that towards the end of the novel the city looks deserted and in rubble after its inhabitants are either killed or escape its deteriorating state. In that sense, Hargeisa is the real orchard of lost souls. It represents the Somali state and its leaders who eat the fruits of war, by accumulating wealth and power watered by the blood and lives of its citizens.

For her part, Deqo's sense of isolation is heightened by the fact that she is overcome with the shame of telling others that she was born and raised in a refugee camp and that she has no family she can relate to: she "knows the way smiles fade when she tells people she is from the refugee camp" (80). So she chooses to hide her identity, unless she is speaking to people like the four prostitutes probably because society calls them "lechers and dirty women" (74). This does not alleviate her sense of isolation, though. When Nasra wants to know what it is like "being all alone in the world at [her] age" (77), for example, we learn that the question "hits [her] like a falling branch" and makes her uncomfortably "shuffle her feet a little [as she] tries to pick through the words lodged on her lips" (77). This is understandable, given the circumstances surrounding her birth:

> The truth [about her birth] is so brutal in contrast. She has no knowledge at all of where the rest of her family are; there are no stories passed on by cousins, no villages to return to, no genealogy to pass on if she ever has children of her own. She is like a sapling growing out of the bare earth while others are branches on old, established trees. (92)

When Nasra temporarily takes her in, she feels a sense of belonging to a family at last. The fact that she "felt natural being bathed by Nasra, as if she [Nasra] was an older sister or mother" (98), for example, reveals the extent to which Deqo yearns for familial connection. Mohamed develops an optimistic ending for Deqo, when we see her telling the Ethiopian

official working for the UN in the Saba'ad refugee camp that her "mother and grandmother" need help outside (334). In the larger context of Deqo searching for a family and a home, her 'lie' to the UN official concerning the two women waiting for help is especially poignant. The novel ends with Deqo leading a young Somali man (also working for the UN at the refugee camp) to where her 'family' waits:

> He places a hand gently on her shoulder and leads her out of the tent. He collects a wheelchair and she guides him to where Filsan and Kawsar wait. She is back in a familiar world; the war and all that time in Hargeisa just a complicated trial to achieve what she has always wanted: a family, however makeshift (334).

Here, the Saba'ad is not only a symbol of hope to fleeing Somalis but also that of a family home for Deqo. While initially she had longed for familial connection, she now returns to it with two women whom she relates to as family. Here, the institution of the family takes on a different meaning. It is the type of family which is constituted along affiliation rather than filiation or biological connections. In a way, then, Mohamed seems to suggest that violence and civil war are insidious. They separate families and rob people of their loved ones.

Filsan's isolation in the novel is expressed more through her relationship with her parents than with the idea of not having a family. She is depicted as having a lonely childhood, the result of staying with a strict and abusive father who had divorced her mother when she was barely five years old (256). Her parents had divorced when her mother left her father for another man (255), and her father "had only given her mother a divorce on condition that she left Filsan to him, for him" (256). Since then, her life had revolved around her father who had literally "locked her away" (213), not allowing her to interact with anyone outside their home. Although she rises through the ranks to become an 'honoured' daughter of the land as her father had wished, she still feels "alone, untouched, forgotten" (209), leading "the celibate, sterile, quiet existence of a nun, growing nothing but grey hairs" (213). Mohamed uses these strong descriptions to reveal the true character of Filsan. Like Kawsar and Deqo, she lacks a home and companionship.

Out of the three female protagonists in the novel, Deqo stands out as someone who is given real agency in the novel. She knows that "It is wrong for any child, especially a girl, to be sleeping anywhere near [the] ditch, with wild dogs and even wilder men" (82), yet given the circumstances under which she was brought into the world, she takes her chances by looking

out for herself, and oftentimes sharing living space with "wilder men." But unlike Filsan who craves power and men's attention, Deqo knows where to draw the line between herself and the men especially where they are too close for comfort. Thus, when she stumbles on two drunks warming themselves by the fire on a cold night and when one of them "reaches out to grab at her thigh[,] she jumps quickly beyond his reach" and calls him "a disgusting old lizard" because she suspects he wanted to rape her (53). This incident not only unsettles her but also leads her to keep vigil for the rest of the night. She knows that "her legs are tired, her eyelids eager to drop, but she can't sleep here with them" (55). So she "sits down heavily on the mulch and crosses her legs. She will wait until the sunrise and then … sleep for a couple of hours" afterwards (55). The fact that she "crosses her legs" even though she looks tired reveals the extent to which Deqo feels insecure in the presence of the two drunks. She immediately decides to keep herself on guard, probably recalling the instructions she had received from the women in the Saba'ad refugee camp who had warned her: "don't sit with your legs open, don't touch your privates, don't play with boys" (64). In another attempted rape incident, when Mustafa (one of Nasra's regular customers) tries "to prise open her legs," she sticks a stiletto knife in his eye and flees the brothel (116). These descriptions are striking in the action they imply. Deqo may be a mere child, but she is ready to fight for her rights and keep herself safe even when she knows that she is a poor orphan, oftentimes at the mercy of strangers. Overall, these words convey a pervasive atmosphere of vulnerability for Deqo as a child. Nadifa Mohamed deliberately refuses to dwell on the men's actions here and focuses on Deqo's instead.

Deqo's agency does not stop at protecting herself from the bad men, however. She also embodies what Anthony Giddens describes as "the individual [who] 'make[s] a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events" (*Constitution* 14). As she wanders through the streets of Hargeisa, we see her shooing stray dogs that feast on the decomposing human corpses. In one touching incident, Deqo drags the body of a partially eaten man into a barely deep hole that she dug to "give him the dignity of a burial" (306). Towards the end of the novel, when everyone has escaped, she is seen guiding Kawsar and Filsan through the deserted streets of Hargeisa to the Saba'ad refugee camp. These actions, however small, are symbolic representations of human agency. It is as if the author wants to show us that real power to effect things lies with Deqo; that she is the one who must do something about her (and her fellow female characters') condition if they are to survive both the misogynist society and the violent carnage. It is no coincidence, then, that *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

starts and ends with women. They are a pervasive feature of the novel; they symbolise a struggle, they represent resilience, and they play a major part in Nadifa Mohamed's construction of a desolate nation-state that still needs its women to survive.

It is possible to argue that Mohamed's use of three women from three different generations in her novel takes a darker turn in the representation of women's lives within the socio-political crises that have defined Somalia in recent times. As I point out in the introduction to this section, Somalia has had a complex history, wrought with violence and insecurity. In this case Nadifa Mohamed, a historian, is employing a paradigm of historical trauma precisely to contextualise what the three generations of women have been through since Somalia gained independence from its colonial masters.

4.4. Writing Rape, Abjection and Collective Trauma: Bashir's *Tears of the Desert*

Halima Bashir's *Tears of the Desert* – the memoir that recounts the atrocities committed by the Janjaweed Arab militias against Darfuris – has received critical acclaim for its candid documentation of the marginalisation and racist discrimination the Khartoum-led government has allegedly committed toward the African animists, Christians and Muslims in western Sudan. John Slania suggests that in "telling her story to journalist Damien Lewis, [Bashir is making] an attempt to exorcise some of her personal demons and hoping to inspire the rest of the world to stop the bloodshed" in Darfur ("Tears" par. 4). Ironically, Bashir does not seem to agree with these stereotypical representations, choosing instead to portray her Zaghawa community as "a fierce, warlike black African people who are the most generous and open when welcoming strangers"[55] and that they are full of "loving warmth and security" (4). While she acknowledges that to outsiders Darfur is "a word soaked in suffering and blood" and "a name that conjures up terrible images of a dark horror and an evil without end" (4) she nevertheless insists that, to her, "Darfur means something quite different: It was and is that irreplaceable, unfathomable joy that is home" (4). But while it is true that half of the memoir paints an idyllic picture of Darfur with its "warm, lively domestic and communal … environments that surrounded [Bashir] as she was growing up" (Gagiano, "African Library" par. 2), this memorable portrayal is also candid about the violent carnage that has claimed millions of lives and driven people like the author out of Sudan.

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[55] Halima Bashir and Damien Lewis, *Tears of the Desert: A Memoir of Survival in Darfur* (One World Books, 2009), p. 4. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

Bashir was born and raised in Darfur, into a loving family that was part of the black African Zaghawa community. She attended junior and secondary school there, before proceeding to study medicine at a university in Khartoum. By the time she started practicing medicine, aged 24, the Janjaweed had intensified their attacks on black Africans in Darfur. When she inadvertently spoke to a journalist against the atrocities at the hospital in Hashma (where she was doing voluntary work while awaiting government posting), and intimated that the government should help all Darfuris regardless of their ethnicity, the secret police came for her. They drove her to "a 'ghost house' – a place that looked just like any other residence, but was a secret detention centre" (184) where she was accused of being the Zaghawa doctor who helped the rebels. She was ordered to sign a declaration form not to speak to the media again or face the consequences. Following the incident, the Ministry of Health transferred her to a remote village clinic in Mazkhabad in Northern Darfur, a punishment posting where she was the only doctor. In January 2004, the Janjaweed attacked a primary school close to her new duty post and gang-raped more than forty girls[56] aged between seven and thirteen. After treating the "seething mass of crying, traumatised schoolgirls" that had turned up with their "shocked grieving parents" at her local clinic (213), she refused to stay silent once again, this time giving detailed witness statements to UN representatives about the attack on the school. Barely a week after the incident Bashir was abducted by state police and driven to a military camp on the outskirts of the village where she was interrogated, tortured, and then gang-raped for three days as punishment for speaking out and exposing the rape of women and girls by the Janjaweed. After she was released, she escaped to her home village. Five months later, the Janjaweed raided her village and killed her father in the ensuing battle. Bashir fled her home in 2005 to seek asylum in Britain from where she wrote her memoir, assisted by Damien Lewis. The memoir is divided into four parts, corresponding with the four 'phases' in Bashir's life: Part One focuses on her childhood; Part Two focuses on her primary and post-primary education; Part Three depicts her university education, her graduation as a medical doctor, the civil war and the gang rapes by the Janjaweed. Finally, Part Four deals with her daring escape from Darfur to London and her life as a refugee there.

[56] The exact number of those raped is not known. As Bashir herself observes, "there were more rape victims than that." She suspects that some parents "were so ashamed [to bring their daughters to the local clinic] that they had taken [them] home" to "treat them privately with traditional cures. In that way, they hoped to keep the violation of their loved ones secret." (216)

From the subtitle, *A Memoir of Survival in Darfur*, Bashir draws the reader's attention to want to know more about Darfur and why she chooses to call her narrative a survival memoir. Thus, a brief background to Darfur would be helpful at this point. Darfur is a region in the western part of Sudan. In the words of historian Jok Madut Jok, the region has three ethnic zones. The north includes Arabs and non-Arabs, mainly Zaghawa, camel nomads. The central zone is inhabited largely by non-Arab sedentary farmers such as the Fur, Masalit and others, cultivating millet. In the south, there are Arabic-speaking cattle nomads, the Rezeigat branch of Baggara. All these people are Muslims, and despite perceptions among the groups in the region that each holds title to specific territories, no part of Darfur is ethnically homogeneous (*Sudan* 120). In February 2003, a new armed insurgent group, calling itself the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and composed mainly of members of the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit ethnic groups was formed and attacked government targets. In April 2003, another insurgent group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), emerged. The two armed groups maintain that they are not separatists. Rather, they demand an end to the marginalization of Darfur and more protection for the settled population, which they profess to represent. In what could be read as the anxieties of the empire over its response to rebellion from its subjects, the Khartoum-led government has mobilised and armed a proxy militia group called the *Janjaweed* to deal with the non-Arabs living in the rural areas. These Arab militias, Jok notes, "have since engaged in mass killings, rapes, lootings and burnings of villages, to a degree never witnessed anywhere in Muslim regions in the country in recorded history" (*Sudan* 21). This has led Bashir to be justifiably critical of the government. In accordance with these ethnocentric accounts, for example, she depicts the Arabs as "ruthless," "racists," "outsiders" and "a bunch of criminals, murderers, and thieves" who stole power in Sudan (126), while blacks are portrayed as the 'owners' of the land. She also describes the Arabs as people who own the best homes and covet the best jobs despite being a minority in Sudan (99).[57]

A key observation that Lesley McDowell makes in her review of *Tears of the Desert* is that "Bashir's account of her gang rape at the hands of the Janjaweed Arab militias in Darfur takes up a tiny part of this book" ("Review" par. 2). Yet this "tiny part" is crucial to understanding how rape is used as a weapon of war in Darfur. Indeed, while it is true that

[57] Needless to say, these descriptions allow Bashir to find a discourse helpful in explaining her story. In so doing however, she becomes an unwitting accomplice in the perpetration of the very racist ideologies her memoir appears to condemn for dividing Sudan.

more than half of the memoir talks about Bashir's childhood among her Zaghawa community, this largely idyllic picture does not reproduce so much as expose the racist ideologies of the Islamist government in Khartoum and its link to the brutal conflict currently taking place in Darfur. *Tears of the Desert* demonstrates that rape is what Sharon Frederick calls a "weapon of terror," and that its aim is "either to subjugate [an entire civilian population] to the will of the attackers … or to physically displace or annihilate them as a people" (*Rape* 5). It is possible to read rape as an allegory of a violated land, by looking at how the Darfur region has been stripped of its mineral resources over the years. In this sense, one could suggest that Darfur is feminised and metonymized as woman over which different forms of masculinities fight either to conquer her resources or protect her from further exploitation. This understanding would fit into the accusations that have been levelled against the Khartoum-led government so far, that it continues to marginalise Darfur even though the region's resources are the country's economic mainstay. My focus in this study however, leans towards the literal meaning of rape,[58] wherein I examine the discourse of conquest and subjugation by rape and its psychosocial effects. I argue that a concern with women and girls' vulnerability to – and survival of – sexual violence looms large in *Tears of the Desert*, and is the prism through which the lives of Darfuris (both men and women) could be understood. I thus find it useful to make use of the literature on abjection to investigate the impact of wartime rape on individuals, families and communities as narrated in the memoir.

In what remains one of the most comprehensive theories of abjection, Julia Kristeva reveals in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) that the abject is "neither subject nor object," the dirty, the "improper/ unclean" (*Powers* 2). She further notes that abjection "disturbs identity, system, order," that "the one by whom the abject exists is … a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing." (*Powers* 8; emphases and parentheses in original). From Kristeva's observations, we can deduce that the main point of her theory is that of a liminal subject, someone who is "in-between," "ambiguous," "composite" (*Powers* 4). A close reading of *Tears of the Desert* confirms Kristeva's theory as it demonstrates, for example, how those who have been raped are wracked by guilt and are treated as outcasts by

[58] There are many definitions of rape. My own understanding of the term is that it is an event that occurs without the other person's consent, and which involves the use of force or threat of force. It also involves penetration of the victim's vagina, mouth or rectum either by a penis, fingers or an object. In this study, I limit the use of the term to those incidences where women and girls are penetrated through the vagina, since this is what we encounter in Bashir's memoir.

their communities. This is exemplified through Miss Sumiah, the teacher who is raped alongside the schoolgirls in the memoir. Unlike the girls who can narrate their ordeals to their parents, Sumiah decides to tell "not a word about what had happened to her" (215) because "[s]he was married, and she didn't want her husband to know." Besides, "[s]he was feeling guilty: guilty that she hadn't resisted her attackers, fought them off, or died trying to do so" (215). Similar words are echoed by Bashir when she runs away to her home village after she is also gang raped. Bashir confesses to her father that she felt guilty (230), as if she had deliberately invited the soldiers to rape her. This is what Alison Healicon means when she observes that "women who have experienced sexual violence feel complicit in their abuse and blame themselves" (*Politics* 63). Thus if placed within its cultural context, Sumiah and Bashir's feelings of guilt and their inability to tell their stories fits into 'typical' rape myths that usually deny and trivialise sexual violence against women by transferring blame for rape from the perpetrator to the victim.[59] In *The Politics of Sexual Violence* (2016), Healicon proposes a psychosocial discourse of harm through which rape victims are usually articulated. She calls it the "credibility conundrum" and argues that rape victims usually suffer from "the fear of not being believed, of being cast a[s] liar[s]" (*Politics* 41) by the communities. Healicon insists that this discourse is so prolific that "it has become the measure of women's credibility and therefore their claim to truth" (*Politics* 40); and that it is "significant enough to silence women who have experienced rape … and inhibits [their] attempts at seeking advice, support, and justice" (*Politics* 41). In *Tears of the Desert,* the fear-of-not-being-believed discourse as demonstrated by Sumiah is located within 'accepted' and 'acceptable' Darfuri images, metaphors and tropes of rape victims as people who "were somehow seen as being damaged goods, their lives destroyed by the evil that had happened to them" (216). Elsewhere, Bashir speaks of victims of rape as "likely to be treated as … outcast[s] by their community, and even their family" (234). Here, Bashir's notion of raped women as 'damaged goods' and 'outcasts' recall notions of 'taboo,' 'filth' and pollution that Kristeva associates with the abject.

Further, other scholars like Bülent Diken and Carsten Laustsen ascribe feelings of abjection to rape victims. Diken and Laustsen hold, for example, that "the rape victim often perceives

[59] Susan Brownmiller is particularly informative in her critique of male distrust of raped women. In her phenomenal study *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), she attributes this distrust to "male fear of the false rape charge brought by a lying woman – the old syndrome of Potiphar's wife" (370). The concern over the false rape charge operates more as a cover than as an expression of real fear; it justifies male disbelief in female testimony.

herself as an abject, … 'dirty,' morally inferior person" because "the penetration inflicts on her body and her self a mark, a stigma, which cannot be effaced" ("Becoming" 113). They add that this abjection "has a communal aspect as well" in that "the victim is excluded by neighbours and by family members. Hence [she] suffers twice: first by being raped and second by being condemned by a patriarchal community" ("Becoming" 113). We find more evidence about abjection in the memoir when Bashir is raped. After the incident, she escapes to her home village where she locks herself up in her Grandma's hut for days, "hiding from the world" (232). As she relates,

> The only people who knew what had happened to me were my family members, and *they were determined to keep it that way*. When people asked why I had come home, they said that I'd sought safety in the village from the war. Because I didn't want to see anyone, they told visitors that I was resting after a long and difficult journey (232-33, my emphasis).

Shame and fear of social exclusion infiltrate this narrative insofar as Bashir's family is embarrassed to tell fellow villagers what had happened to their daughter. The family is consciously aware of the 'damage' the gang rape has done to the family name and it quickly moves in to 'protect' Bashir (and itself) from further humiliation.

Systematic wartime rape has received considerable critical attention and a clear consensus emerges concerning its physical and psychosocial consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Among the notable critics that have written extensively on the subject, albeit from different standpoints, Susan Brownmiller, Catharine MacKinnon, Claudia Card, Ruth Seifert and Sharon Frederick concur that wartime rape is a conscious government and/or warring side's "policy," and that its aim is to traumatise not only victims but families and whole communities as well. In *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues* (2006), MacKinnon observes, for example, that wartime rape "happens on purpose, not just with the function of harming people, or of having sex, or of planting a flag, but to destroy peoples as such on a designated group basis" (*Are Women* 223). The point that MacKinnon makes here is that sexual atrocities against women are a weapon of war and ultimately a means to genocide. Wartime rape, in her view, is "rape under orders," something that is part of "an official policy of war in a genocidal campaign for political control" (*Are Women* 187). She further clarifies her position by insisting that wartime rape is

> rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others; rape as spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide (*Are Women* 187).

Similar views are echoed by Claudia Card who argues that rape in war (what she calls "martial rape") is an effective way to commit genocide against female community members since it "serve[s] as a bonding agent among perpetrators" while, at the same time, it works "to alienate family members, friends and former neighbours from each other" ("Rape" 7). To suggest that wartime rape is not about destroying a community or group's identity both physically and culturally is, for MacKinnon and Card, a disavowal of a narrative that constructs women as central to the continued existence of a family, community or nation. In Julie Mostov's words, "women are biological reproducers of group members, of the ethnonation. They bear sons to fight and daughters to care for the motherland" ("Our Women" 518). And because they are the ones biologically designed to reproduce the nation and preserve its numbers, they become the enemy's principal target if one intends to destroy a culture. Rape ensures that this destruction is complete, as the raped woman is often rejected by family and community members. This is the case because, according to Dorothy Thomas and Regan Ralph, "by virtue of being a rape victim, a woman becomes the perceived agent of her community's shame. In a bizarre twist, she changes from a victim into a guilty party, responsible for bringing dishonour upon her family or community" ("Rape" 210). The overall effect of this, as expressed by Allison Reid-Cunningham, is that the family or community may be forced to cast out rape survivors and children born of rape, abuse them further, or even kill them thereby causing deeper emotional damage to all involved and tearing at the fabric that holds families and the community together ("Rape" 291).

Situating the rape of women and girls against this body of scholarship is important, as it helps us to understand the political, religious, cultural and racist undercurrents as well as the corporeal trauma that pervades Bashir's memoir. The poignant exchange between Sumiah and Bashir concerning their ordeal, for example, is presented as one that exposes Sudan's racial bigotry where the Janjaweed Arab militias use rape as an instrument to diminish the black community's identity and force them out of Sudan. This is exemplified in Sumiah's account to Bashir of what the Janjaweed had said to her (and the girls) as they raped them:

> They were shouting and screaming at us. You know what they were saying? 'We have come here to kill you! To finish you all! You are black slaves! You are worse than dogs! Either we kill you or we give you Arab children. Then there will be no more black slaves in this country' …. [T]hey were laughing and yelping with joy as they did those terrible things. Those grown men were enjoying it, as they passed the little girls around… (217)

From Sumiah's graphic description of the gang rape, one gets the impression that it verges on the bestial in its evocation of "shouting," "screaming" and "yelping" men with "guns, knives and heavy sticks" that were used on any girl who tried to resist the rape (217). She adds the ominous observation that the whole gang rape "was like a band of wild animals just jumping on us and forcing us on the floor" (217). The animalistic imagery with which the Janjaweed are described here horrifies the reader, just as the debasing manner in which the rape victims are treated further disturbs us.

It is important to see some of the ways in which listening to stories of pain and suffering affects the listener. In "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" (1992), Dori Laub establishes that witnessing – in which "the listener to the narrative of extreme human pain" becomes "a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event" ("Bearing" 57) – is vital to the restoration of the mental health of the testifier. By talking to someone who lends a listening ear, the victim is able to get control over his/her memories and thus avoid painful flashbacks or nightmarish intrusions ("Bearing" 57-68). Laub's assertions reinforce my analysis of *Tears of the Desert*. I hold that the memoir does not reflect a single scene of recuperation, either of the victims or those who listen to their sad tales. What we get instead is a scenario where those who lend a listening ear or are closer to the victim end up being traumatised. This can be seen in Bashir's reaction after listening to Sumiah's sad account. Bashir confesses to "stay[ing] at the clinic [where Sumiah and the raped girls had sought her help] late into the night, [her] mind in a whirl of exhausted thoughts" as she "kept replaying Sumiah's words in [her] mind" (218). I suggest that Bashir's action of staying up late is caused by her shock at the events and that she is still trying to process the atrocities narrated to her.

The traumatic nature of the Janjaweed's actions is accentuated in Sumiah's retelling of what Reid-Cunningham describes as "dehumanizing epithets featuring racialized or gendered slurs" ("Rape" 287). She further relates:

> In all the confusion one or two of the girls managed to escape. They ran to their homes and raised the alarm. But when the parents rushed to the school they found a cordon of government soldiers had surrounded it and were letting nobody in. If anyone came too close, the soldiers shot at them with their guns. Parents could hear their daughters screaming but there was no way they could help.
> For two hours they held the school. They abused the girls in front of their friends, forcing them to watch what they were doing. Any girls who tried to resist were beaten in the head with sticks or rifle butts.
> 'Before they left, they spat on us and urinated on us,' Sumiah whispered. 'They said: "We will let you live so you can tell your mothers and fathers and brothers what we did to you. Tell them from us: If you stay, the same and worse will happen to you all. Next time, we will show no mercy. Leave this land. Sudan is for Arabs. It is not for black dogs and slaves."' (217-18)

In the cordon of soldiers around the school who shoot at anyone who comes too close, the memoir captures a clear link between the militias and the Khartoum-led government. This link implicates the latter as sanctioning the Janjaweed's atrocities in Darfur. Similar "racialized slurs" are repeated to Bashir after she is also gang raped. Before she is released, one of her captors tells her thus:

> 'You know what we have decided to do with you?' he announced, quietly. 'We're going to let you live. We're not going to kill you. Get it? Not die. Not die. Live.'
> …
> 'You know why we're going to let you live?' he added. 'We're going to let you live because you'd prefer to die. Isn't that clever for us? Aren't we clever, doctor? We may not have your education, but we're damn smart, wouldn't you agree?'
> …
> 'The Croucher shrugged. Anyway, go. Go. It's over, for now. You know what rape is, so go. The Teacher and the others – they've shown you. As for me, I wouldn't touch a black dog like you [even] if my life depended on it. Anyway, go. Go and tell the world. For the rest of your life you're going to have to live with it. Go and tell whoever you want to what rape is' (227-28).

In Sumiah and Bashir's descriptions of the gang rapes, the female body is used as a symbol of filth, symbolised by the Janjaweed jumping on the women's and girls' bodies as well as spitting and urinating on them contemptuously. Such acts confirm one of Ruth Seifert's five theorisations on the motives of rape in and after war, that there is a virulent misogyny towards women that is lived out in times of crisis. Seifert insists that "women are raped not because they are enemies, but because they are the objects of a fundamental hatred that characterizes the cultural unconscious and is actualised in times of crisis" ("War and Rape" 65). Seifert thus finds "the thesis that rape is primarily a matter of revenge against the

enemy" less convincing ("War and Rape" 65). Overall, the privileging of misogyny over women's rights implicates the granting of male aggression in contexts of war whereby the female body is not only objectified but also treated with abhorrence. This partially explains why most women are killed after being raped.

Arguably, the strongest message to be made about the precarious position of women in war zones is the one articulated by Vesna Kesić, that they "are bodies in pain, regardless of which ethnic group is at some point recognized as aggressor and which as victim" ("Muslim" 311). Kesić's observations are based on the fact that since time immemorial, women and their bodies are the material with and over which battles are waged, an idea that recalls Brownmiller's thesis that "the body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor's trooping of the colours" (*Against* 38). The expression "trooping of the colours" is particularly useful as it signals conquest by one nation by another, followed by the conquering nation's act of planting its "colours" (or flag) in the conquered's territory. This is what Jacklyn Cock also means when she states that war is a gendered activity since "it both uses and maintains the ideological construction of gender in the definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'" (*Colonels* x). Men, she stresses, go to war to protect and defend national values, territories, and borders, and to protect and defend their women and children. Women are cast in the role of the 'protected' and the 'defended.' Cock's views are in concord with those of Seifert, MacKinnon and Brownmiller, who specifically single out the discourse of conquest and subjugation by rape as a violent assertion of virility on the one hand and masculine impotence on the other. In MacKinnon's view, rape in war "has been used as a ritual of degradation of the other side, a way of instilling terror, a tactic of demoralization, a plundering of the booty, and a humiliation rite for the men on the other side who cannot (in masculinity's terms) protect 'their' women" (*Are Women* 222-23; see also Seifert 59). Apart from affirming manhood, "rape in war thus serves as specific psychological warfare and a method of communication, providing symbolic as well as actual reward and symbolic as well as actual revenge. It means supremacy: we are better than you. And possession: we own you" ("Genocide" 223). Brownmiller, on her part, thinks that

> Men of a conquered nation traditionally view the rape of 'their women' as the ultimate humiliation, a sexual coup de grace. Rape is considered by the people of a defeated nation to be part of the enemy's conscious effort to destroy them. In fact, by tradition, men appropriate the rape of 'their women' as part of their own male anguish of defeat…. [R]ape by a conqueror is compelling evidence of the conquered's status

> of masculine impotence. Defence of women has long been a hallmark of masculine pride, as possession of women has been a hallmark of masculine success. (38)

The underlying message behind these polemics is that the body of a woman is used as a conduit for confirming and reinforcing masculinity in contexts of war. Unsurprisingly, most Darfuri men join the Zaghawa rebels after the rape of their women and the attack on the village. The reason, as Seifert speculates, is because they feel "wounded in their masculinity" and fear that they will be "marked as incompetent" if they don't protect their women ("War" 59). Akin to what is known as castration anxiety in Freudian terms, this idea is particularly relevant to social constructions of masculinity where men who fail to protect their women are perceived as weak. Thus the rape of women is not just an assault on male power; rather, it symbolises the defeat of the state-as-male (Musila, "Phallocracies" 40). This leads me to say that the burden of masculinity is the act of asserting to the other male that it is still virile and capable of defending itself and 'protecting' its women.

Though *Tears of the Desert* speaks to the larger collective experience of Darfuris, Bashir concentrates on the micro-narrative of her father and two male siblings to show how they are 'slighted' and 'hurt' upon discovering that they had failed to 'protect' her from being raped. For example, her brother, Omer, is seen "stomp[ing] around looking enraged and fiery" (232) while her father "promise[s] to find the people who had [raped her]," adding "He would find them and kill them all" (230). Needless to say that when the Janjaweed raid their village the men decide to fight them off with their spears and rusty guns, literally trying to salvage their 'lost' manhood(s).

What does it mean then when Part Three of the memoir ends with men taking up arms to protect their women/land from the Arab 'invaders'? What does Bashir imply when she says that after the first Janjaweed attack, her whole community was in "a process of collective mourning, as people shared their pain and their hurt with others who had suffered" (249)? These questions are interlinked, in that they speak of a collective Darfur sensibility that appears to have been breached by 'outsiders.' I therefore propose that besides the presence of corporeal trauma, there is also collective trauma through which Bashir tries to explain the collective traumatic episodes of both men and women in her memoir. Collective trauma is a notion that Kai Erikson relentlessly pursues in her book *Everything in Its Path* (1976), which

she defines as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (154). In her view,

> collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma.' But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that a community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared…. 'We' no longer exists as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body (154).

Likewise, the picture that the reader gets upon reading *Tears of the Desert* is that of a community that has literally fallen apart; one that is experiencing psychocultural trauma. After the Janjaweed raid Bashir's village and kill all the men, we next hear of the surviving women and children leaving their homes. The fact that Part Four of the memoir focuses on such a journey (in which Bashir literally runs away from her community, and into exile) is further testimony to the "insidious awareness" and "gradual realization" Erikson talks about, that as a community Darfuris no longer exist to support let alone defend themselves from danger. We are thus called upon to empathise with this communal suffering which also signals the destruction of an entire society.

Glen Bush's reading of *Tears of the Desert* in "Survivalist Autobiographies: The Struggles for African Muslim Women" (2015) indicates, not surprisingly, that the memoir is part of "narratives of escape and reinvention" ("Survivalist" 130), a "struggle between the [author and her] oppressors" ("Survivalist" 131) and an example of "political weapons designed to expose, rescue, and destroy" ("Survivalist" 132). Although the bulk of this section has focused on women's bodies as the battleground of group struggles, it has nevertheless traced Bashir's fighting spirit first in her ability to speak out against the rape incidents in Darfur and, later, in her determination to see to it that her memoir is literally "given to powerful governments *to expose the terrible abuses in Darfur*" (287; my emphasis). While I am constrained by space and thesis focus from examining the role of the 'powerful governments' in Sudan's fratricidal conflicts, I recognise Bashir's role in exposing the atrocities committed in her country. Bush also insists on this sense of agency in Bashir, noting that

> Bashir's sense of justice and rebellion led her to continue helping people as both a doctor and a spokeswoman. Her decision to break the silence, to put the signed document [the police had forced on her] out of her realm of reality, cause further torture and abuse …

> [But] words – spoken and written – are extremely important to Halima Bashir's life. The stories told to her as a child by her elders …, the words of loss forced on her by her rapists, are the components of her mind and spirit. Eventually, fittingly, it is also words that help her break the feared, oppressive silence when her husband and she decide it is time to speak out for the victims of Darfur ("Survivalist" 148-149)

From Bush's choice or words – 'escape,' 'reinvention,' 'struggle,' 'expose,' 'rescue,' 'sense of justice' and 'break the silence' – comes the case of the public and the private self. The issue here is how Bashir's identity moves from that of a threatened woman who was forced by the police to write her silence (187), to the Zaghawa doctor and spokeswoman for her community both at home and abroad? Examined against Bush's line of thought, I propose that Bashir's memoir is grounded in the study of women as people who can rise above their subjugated selves to fight social injustice. By exploring and exposing the atrocities in Darfur, Bashir's text could be said to be the kind of writing whose engagement with Sudan's postcolonial realities points to what Bhabha calls "an empowering condition of hybridity" (*Location* 324). For a writer to embrace such a form, entails hybridity being "ironic and insurgent" (*Location* 324). Bashir seems to fulfil this (role) with exemplary skill in her memoir.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has given recognition to the fictional portrayal of Eastern African women's victimization and resilience in violent contexts. I have specifically discussed how women's awareness of social injustice galvanises them into action, literally wanting to 'do something' to rid their societies of social vice in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. I have explored the same agential interventions in Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, against a background where women and girls are treated with little or no regard for their humanity. Finally, I have examined how wartime rape traumatises women and girls, their families, and immediate communities in Bashir's *Tears of the Desert*. My argument here is that even when it is the women alone that are sexually violated, the entire community is (or feels) 'violated.' This idea is particularly relevant to the symbolic meaning of wartime rape, since hegemonic military logic sees the violation of a woman's body as symbolising the defeat of a nation. As Brownmiller makes explicit,

> In one act of aggression, the collective spirit of women *and* of the nation is broken, leaving a reminder long after the troops depart. And if she survives the assault, what does the victim of wartime rape become to her people? Evidence of the enemy's

> bestiality. Symbol of her nation's defeat. A pariah. Damaged property. A pawn in the subtle wars of international propaganda. ("Making Female Bodies" 181)

Given the focus that this chapter has taken so far, what prevents the three texts from devolving into a 'herstory' narrative, rather than an analysis of the traumas both men and women face in contexts of violent crisis? The disturbing figure of 'impotent'[60] men who struggle to protect their families and communities in the three texts makes visible the ways in which the life of male figures in war and post-war societies is hollow and somewhat meaningless. In Mohamed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls,* Hargeisa is a city that has been robbed of its male community as those remaining behind, according to Aminatta Forna, "are brutes who bring little but misery: soldiers, policemen, the prostitutes' clients" ("Daughters of Revolution" 11). Hailu, Yonas and even Dawit in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* are no less traumatised than their female counterparts. Even in Bashir's *Tears of the Desert,* where we see the men taking arms to defend 'their' women, we get the sense that these men do this to make sense of their own traumatised selves. The three authors thus creatively engage with the idea that women and girls are not the only people who suffer from the impact of a violent conflict.

[60] I use the word 'impotent' guardedly here, to refer to the ways in which war and violence disempower and/or emasculate men and hegemonic masculinities, to the extent that men begin to feel that they can no longer assert their manhood and sense of personal value as breadwinners in their families.

Chapter Five

Immigrant Itineraries and Traumas

5.1. Introduction

One of the effects of violent conflicts in Eastern Africa is that millions of people have either been internally displaced or forced to leave their homes and set up other homes elsewhere. Emerging on the heels of these migrations is a growing body of writing that evokes the violent conflicts that forced its authors or their compatriots out of their natal homes. The peculiar quality of this migration literature[61] invites a closer look at how people displaced by conflict make sense of their exilic lives. In this chapter I focus on how Cristina Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (2011), Dinaw Mengestu's *All Our Names* (2014) and Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (2007) meditate on processes of constructing what is gained and lost by migrants escaping violent conflicts in Somalia, Ethiopia and Uganda, respectively. I also investigate how the writers deploy namelessness as a narrative strategy, particularly in their examination of dislocation as an alienating experience that engenders migrant identities and which, in turn, is used by individual characters to reinvent and reaffirm their fluid identities. Finally, I examine how the question of intra- and interstate migration is explored in *Waiting*. I propose that within the formal logic of the novel, internally displaced persons are liminal subjects as they, too, experience a persistent lack of belonging.

I anchor all the three sections of this chapter on Homi Bhabha's concept of "DissemiNation," to explore how the leaving of people's homes for different places/spaces is imagined in the three novels. Bhabha describes "DissemiNation" as "the scattering of the people across countries" and "their gathering [elsewhere]" (*Location* 243). Bhabha, then, proceeds to describe migration as "that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering" (*Location* 199). In an important way, Ali Farah's, Mengestu's and Kyomuhendo's casting of their characters in

[61] In *Migration and Literature* (2008), Søren Frank makes an important distinction between 'migrant literature' and 'migration literature,' arguing that the former "relates to authorial biography" or "the person behind the work" while the latter refers "to intratextual concerns" or "the work's stylistic and thematic design" (15). The focus of this chapter is not necessarily on the authors' lives but on the novels' internal dynamics as narrated by the protagonists. Hence in this study, the word *migration* will be used to refer "not only to the life of the author, but also to the lives of the fictional characters and to the overall thematic framework and the discursive strategies of the novels" (Frank 15).

their novels finds close connection with the notions that Bhabha provides on the demands of immigrant identities: that migration is a troubling experience for exiles and émigrés and refugees, troubled with whether or not they will gain approval and acceptance from their host society (*Location* 199). Most important of all, in fleeing their natal homes the characters embrace the kind of agency that Bhabha describes as "relocation and reinscription" (*Location* 264). In reference to the aforegoing, I argue that the identity of the novels' characters remains in an endless liminal state. I, therefore, advise that the three novels locate the anguish and trauma of the migrants' search for belonging and for a sense of self-worth.

5.2. Violence, Dispossession, Mourning: Ali Farah's *Little Mother*

Ubax Cristina Ali Farah was born in Verona, Italy, in 1973 to an Italian mother and a Somali father. She spent most of her childhood in Mogadishu, Somalia, before the civil war forced her to flee the country in January 1991. Since then, she has never returned to Somalia (Di Maio xvii), choosing instead to visit her father and many other relatives who relocated to Zeist, in the Utrecht region in the Netherlands. Ali Farah calls Zeist "a moving home, my *Guri*" (Wardheer 2; original emphasis, par. 7). The trajectory of *Little Mother*, then, loops and knots together Ali Farah's pathways from her country of birth to Mogadishu, and then back to Europe. Johanna Wagner views the novel as "admittedly more autobiographical" and that its storyline parallels the author's life,[62] "which is marked by multiple migrations: from Italy to Somalia in 1976, fleeing Somalia with her son in 1991, settling in Hungary until finally returning to Italy in the late 1990s" ("Written" 118). In this section, I go beyond this self-referentiality[63] to analyse the manner in which Ali Farah writes the life stories of innumerable other Somali exiles into her book. The author does this by investing her narrative with three points of view – that of Domenica Axad, Barni and Taageere – each of which is assigned three chapters to narrate their experiences as people caught at the wrong end of Somalia's internecine conflicts, and who, like Ali Farah, decide to go into exile. The novel's multiple settings – Rome, Mogadishu, Kenya, Amsterdam, Utrecht, London, Canada,

[62] The parallel referred to here is that between Ali Farah and Axad, one of the novel's three main protagonists. Axad, like Ali Farah, is portrayed in the novel as the daughter of a Somali man and an Italian woman. But unlike Ali Farah (who was born in Italy in 1973), Axad is portrayed as being "born in Mogadishu in 1970" (194). At the age of nine, Axad and her mother relocate to Italy (209). Eleven years later, in December 1990, Axad returns to Mogadishu, only for her to flee three days later because of the civil war (215).

[63] Here I borrow Paul Eakin's, Nancy Miller's and Hertha Dawn Wong's observations that all autobiographies are relational; that there is a link "between self-narrating and representation of an autobiography's others" (Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 38). In the words of Hertha Wong, autobiographies embody a "relational self" which "is connected intimately to a specific landscape." Such a relational self "reflects deep connections not only to one's people, but to the land and its natural cycles as well." The "relational identity [that is created] depends for its existence […] on others. (14, 38, 39. See also Eakin, *Touching* 3, and Miller, *But Enough* 2-3)

Helsinki, and several towns in Germany – further accentuates the theme of migrancy and uncovers the ways in which Somalis can be perceived in the global neighbourhood today.

Published sixteen years after Ali Farah left Somalia[64] *Little Mother* looks back at what Lidwien Kapteijns describes as "the ruinous legacy of 1991,"[65] especially to Somalia's younger generation of migrants. The novel's nine chapters are narrated by three protagonist-narrators, who weave their life stories back and forth between the Mogadishu of 1991 and the evolving present in Europe and North America. Domenica is the neurotic daughter of a Somali father and Italian mother; Barni is a midwife "whose narrative deals most explicitly with the mutual distrust and resentment that divides Somali refugees in the wake of the civil war violence" (Kapteijns, "Book Review" 146-147), and Taageere is an alienated divorcé who (later) marries Domenica in exile. The novel suggests that Somalis need to leave behind their individual inclinations and clan-based differences, to forge a common front in their adopted homes. Through the complex networks of movements and the interrelationships in the novel, Ali Farah traces the intersection of displacement and Somali solidarity, uncovering the ways in which the Somali diaspora[66] tries to make sense of its uprootedness.

It is not surprising, then, that some scholars embrace the account that migrancy and Somali solidarity are enduring themes in the novel. In her introduction to *Little Mother* Alessandra Di Maio remarks that "the metaphor of the diaspora as a tangled net that is to be unravelled and stitched back up recurs through the novel" (xx), while Claire Lavagnino notes that central to the novel's premise is the "act of reconstructing one's world through a remapping of personal relationships and communal space" in a new environment ("Women's" 59). Lavagnino also points out that the novel employs three narrative modes which further reflect its transnational/ migrant nature.[67] The centrality of diaspora in Ali Farah's creative work and

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[64] *Little Mother* first appeared in Italian, in 2007, under the title of *Madre Piccola*. An English translation of the book by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto appeared in 2011. All page references will be based on the translated English text, and will appear parenthetically in this study.

[65] Kapteijns uses this expression as a subtitle of her book, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991* (2013), where she suggests that between 1990 and 1992 Somali leaders mobilised ordinary people to engage in a campaign of brutal violence against their fellow citizens by manipulating the construct of 'clan.' I use the term not so much to concur with Kapteijns' views on clannism in her study than to underscore the after-effects of the Somali Civil War following the ousting from power of President Siad Barre in 1991.

[66] I use the word diaspora advisedly here to refer to Somali immigrants that live outside Somalia (particularly Europe and North America). By using this term, I by no chance imply that the word can or should be used synonymously with "migrancy" because "not all dispersals result in the formation of diasporas" (Zeleza" 39).

[67] The three narrative modes, according to Lavagnino, are the testimonial form, the conversation form and the epistolary form. Lavagnino thinks that "The prelude, interlude, and the epilogue are testimonials [that] include

its link to migrant identities is powerfully underlined by Ali Farah herself in an interview where she says that her work is concerned with the ways Somaliness is tested in the face of the *persona non-grata* status that exile confers on individuals. She notes,

> The underlying question of the novel is: What happens to an individual when the world he knows has suddenly gone missing? The novel's characters search for the personal and collective answer to this question. It's our imagination and relationships, dialogue and constant acclimation to our surroundings that allows us to survive. Reconstructing our own symbolic map allows us to relocate ourselves in a common space made up of interpersonal relationships (qtd. in Lavagnino 59)

The phenomenon of Somalis reconstructing their own symbolic map in their relocated environments is criticised more convincingly by Nuruddin Farah in his writings. In the eponymic "A Country in Exile," for instance, Farah observes that Somalia is "a country in exile" where "more than half of its population have abandoned [the country] to its sad fate" (715). Farah's observations about Somalia may be a little exaggerated,[68] but they are central to understanding debates surrounding how Somalia is imagined as a (centralised) nation state. A number of critics have produced competing explanations for what Annie Gagiano calls "the politics of the clan that have fractured and devastated Somalia" ("Surveying" 253), all of which point to the highly contentious issue of clannism, warlordism and nomadism as playing a big role in abetting lawlessness, destruction and displacement in Somalia. The 1998 Human Development Report is one such document that provides a useful insight into clannism as a central organising force in Somali societies. On the account of the Report, clannism is seen to be both divisive and a destructive tool in the hands of political leaders as well as a vital source of group protection, social security and customary law in the absence of the State (HDR 36).[69] Clannism is often controlled by a council of clan elders (the *Gurti*), considered

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verses of Somali oral poetry/songs … interspersed around the narrators' words"; Barni's first chapter is an interview conversation between Barni and a female Italian journalist; Taageere's chapter 3 and Axad's chapter 4 are phone conversations (Taageere speaks with his ex-wife Shukri and Axad speaks with Barni); Barni's chapter 6 is a conversation with Axad and most likely the response to/other half of Axad's chapter 4; Taageere's chapter 7 is a conversation with an immigration interpreter/investigator; and Domenica's chapter 8 is a letter she wrote to her psychologist. (61; slashes and parentheses in the original).

[68] Recent figures indicate, for example, that only 14% of the Somali population is now living outside the country. For details see Gardner and El Bushra 236.

[69] This is heavily contested by Nuruddin Farah, who maintains that the causes of the conflicts in Somalia are complex and interlinked. Farah is of the view that basing the disintegration of the Somali state on clannism "is wholly inadequate as an explanation of why the country has gone to ruin as a functioning society." In his work and interviews, Farah insists that "clannishness is a symptom, not a cause of Somalia's ills." He also disputes "the facile explanation that Somali society is 'naturally' … a cluster of perpetually warring sub-national clan-units – and hence impossible to unify democratically" (qtd. in Gagiano, "Surveying" 255).

to be the dominant institution that has replaced formal administrative structures in Somalia. The *Gurti*'s role is to define community priorities, maintain peace and make resource allocation decisions. They largely use a traditional Somalia system of governance which consists of sets of contractual agreements (*xeer*) and customary laws, that define the rights and the responsibilities of the individual within the family, clan and among neighbours. Ultimately there are many clan-based factions in Somalia, each with its own militia. The most powerful factions exercise authority over standing militias and often constitute the most important political authority in a region (HDR 37). Needless to say, some observers classify Somalia as a failed state.[70]

In this case, Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" offers a useful pointer in understanding the conflicts in Somalia. Mbembe proposes the term "necropolitics" to account for the ways in which "weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds* [and] vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (40; original emphases). In my view, refugees or migrants fit the description of the "living-dead" referred to by Mbembe here since, after escaping the persecutions and near death in their natal homes, they become objects of a (host) society that not only Others them but also ensures the reduction of their identity to this condition. I am interested in the discourse "necropolitics" inscribes on dispossessed Somalis,[71] and what it reveals about their mourning and loss in the narrative world of Ali Farah's novel. In the rest of this section, I frame my argument around three clusters of ideas. First, I focus on how the novel works to inscribe violence and dispossession of Somalis in Somalia and outside it. Here, I trace Ali Farah's fictional depiction of Barni's, Taageere's and Domenica's journeys out of Somalia as their country descends into violence. I also examine the ambiguous diasporic concepts of *home* and *belonging*, and *inclusion* and *exclusion*, with reference to how the three protagonists feel about themselves, about Somalia, and about their host societies. Second, I discuss what I term the sea metaphor in the novel. Here, I suggest that Ali Farah's depiction of the fleeing Somalis' pathways through the boats on the

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[70] I find Jean-Germain Gros' taxonomy of "failed states" informative in this regard. Gros thinks Somalia is a failed state of the "anarchic" type, where "armed groups acting under orders from warlords, but sometimes also on their own, fight it out for the eventual control of a non-existing state" (459).

[71] I use 'dispossession' in this study in reference to "precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood, and become subject to military and legal violence" and that "it is both forcible and privative." For details see Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013): 3

Mediterranean Sea is a narrative strategy that the author uses to transmit the problems of dislocations of life as well as the relocation and double displacement of Somalis and other horn of Africa migrants. Finally, I extend the notion of forced flight (discussed in the previous chapters) by exploring the image of the Termini train station in Italy (where most Somali immigrants flee to, in the narrative world of the novel) as not only symbolising an entry point into the Italian/Western interior/metropolis but also as a place that embodies Bhabha's notions of ambivalence and anxiety to fleeing, 'settled' and 'settling' refugees. I argue that the framing of the novel around these three central tropes creates a poignant discourse of trauma, loss, vulnerability and mourning.

Little Mother presents an opportunity to explore Robin Cohen's suggestive schema of the common features of diaspora[72] through a distinct re-imagination of Somali migrant identities. As I further elaborate in the subsequent paragraphs, Ali Farah's text concerns events that narrate Somalia as a site of violence, abjection, trauma and bad memories. The author pays particular attention to the ways in which this neurosis affects the novel's central characters and how all of them use what Barni aptly calls "selective memory" (14) to piece together "their own version of what happened" (12) to, or in, Somalia. It is through their emotional snippets that we get to know, for example, that scores of Somalis have steadily been streaming out of their country of birth into other African countries from where some of them have found their way to Europe and North America; that "at the beginning of 1991 …, only the families that controlled [Mogadishu] were able to stay behind" (146), and that since then Somalis are "scattered all over the world" today (155). According to Barni, when the liberation army marched into the city, President Siad Barre pulled out all his most terrifying

[72] In *Global Diaspora: An Introduction*, Cohen lists nine common features of diaspora as follows: (i) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; (ii) alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (iii) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements; (iv) an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; (v) the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland; (vi) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate; (vii) a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; (viii) a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and (ix) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (17). Ali Farah's novel does not reflect all these features. Nevertheless, I propose that Cohen's classification is helpful in our understanding of the reasons why Somalis leave their homeland and how they feel towards the host societies in the novel.

weapons: Kalashnikovs, hand grenades, tanks, machine guns, rifles, canons in "a typical dictator's expression [of] 'after me, no one'" (135).[73]

In my opinion, then, the narrative action of *Little Mother* is located within Somalia's ominous period of political turbulence following the overthrow of military dictator and President Mohamed Siad Barre (also spelled as Maxamed Siyaad Barre) on 26 January 1991 by "the liberation army." During the fighting, Barni remembers, "criminals spread like the plague. They broke into homes. They stole, they raped, they destroyed" (135). Taageere, on his part, expresses anguish at the way Mogadishu – called Xamar in the novel – became unrecognizable after it was besieged:

> Xamar, they have ruined you…. City of mine … where everyone lived in peace and harmony, in safety and freedom…. My brothers, parents, and cousins all lived there. But because of the blood and strife these same brothers are fighting among themselves…. Xamar, they have defiled you. Filled you with bullets, destroyed and burned you, devastated your neighbourhoods, sacked your treasures (127).

Taageere's sentiments are particularly insightful in that he troubles the distinction between patriotism and cynicism, and there is a powerful sense in which most Somalis in the novel and in history have a deep anguish and a sense of disaffection that leads them to seek alternative homes away from their homeland. Nuruddin Farah also examines this social angst, by drawing on the biblical (and Hobbesian) concept of the leviathan, to argue that violence in Somalia has taken on a monstrosity that has caught everyone unawares. He further suggests that 'the body politic' is not free from the pestilence that followed in the wake of the violent fighting. In Farah's view, Somalia is a land

> in the throes of dying, [where] the body politic that *was* Somalia displaced a leviathan. The leviathan in turn begat a monster with unsavoury character traits, and the monster begat numerous unsightly gnomic figures with a gangster's mindset, a gangster carrying out miscarriages of justice. In the evil creatures begotten in this manner, wickedness began to find cause to celebrate, reproducing itself in worrying numbers, multiplying as fungi. The contagion spread, corrupting civil society, which in turn caused the death of the body-politic. A virus begotten out of violence infected the land with a madness.

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[73] The actual expression, according to Hussein Ali Dualeh, is not "after me, no one," but "When I leave Somalia, I will leave buildings but not people" (qtd. in Meredith 469). This statement is believed to have been uttered by Siad Barre, the man Ali Farah refers to as "dictator" here. Barre came to power through a bloodless military coup on 21 October 1969. He abdicated the presidency and fled into exile Kenya in 1991.

> Such was the mayhem in Mogadiscio, in the initial stages, that there was no knowing where politically motivated necroses ended and where other kinds of gangrene began. However, before long, you couldn't tell the undefined violences apart; they merged, becoming one for all intents and purposes, in the end bringing about the collapse of Somali's civil society and, along and down with it unto death, the entirety of the country's state structures. (*Yesterday* 9)

There are points of convergence between Farah's summation of Somalia's dark side of history in this passage and Ali Farah's fictive engagement with its traumatising impact on the civilian population. Most notably, *Little Mother* represents the frustrations of the Somali diaspora both towards Somalia and their host societies, as I discuss in detail below.

Ali Farah presents revealing details about her characters' lives and the intricate pathways that eventually transport them from their natal homes into the strange homes of Europe and North America. Barni's growth and maturation is rendered as that of the protagonist-narrator who leaves Somalia partly because of the nature of her profession and, also, because of a plan that her uncles devise to get her out of harm's way when she is captured by one of the militia groups in Mogadishu. A midwife, Barni is first fetched from her Mogadishu home by Saciid Saleebaan to assist his sister, Deeqa, who is in labour. On their way to Deeqa's, they are captured by "four ignorant bush boys" (147) lazily driving around the city in what looks like a looted Toyota (148). Social constructions of gender unsettle Barni's captors, for they take her to the militia group's base, unharmed, unmolested, especially when they learn that she is 'a doctor' (148), while Saciid Saleebaan is ordered to leave. Here, Barni stumbles on her uncles, Taariikh and Foodcadde,[74] who successfully negotiate with the rebel leaders for her release from the command base, and (subsequently) out of Somalia.

Taageere's journey into exile also begins from Mogadishu. Domenica describes him as "a man of uncertain paths, a weak will" (116) who gets swayed by anything. He "embodies the very essence of bewilderment" (217). He is portrayed as spending his formative years loafing on the streets of Mogadishu. His youth is uneventful and without any sense of purpose or direction. As he says: "we spent those critical [adolescent] years [smoking hashish]. They helped you resolve your problems with burning metal" (173). He marries Shukri, his first

[74] Taariikh is part of the militia group fighting for the liberation of Somalia, while Foodcadde is at the command base to persuade his brother (i.e. Taariikh) to leave the fighting and go into exile. "But his brother doesn't want to leave, because he believes that the regime has fallen and that it's time to rebuild the country." (125)

wife, but finding his immaturity unbearable, she leaves him and takes their baby boy with her. This leads Taageere to be "overcome with the profound anxiety of [his] impotence" (79) at failing to keep his marriage, while, out there, Mogadishu is falling apart. He begins to see Somalia as holding no meaningful future for him. Lavagnino reads Taageere as someone whose "character is more complex than simply being a deadbeat dad and philanderer, as his life is deeply marked by civil war, trauma, and the separation, isolation, and distances (physical and emotional) that these experiences entail" (65; parentheses in original).

Domenica's character is perhaps the most complex. The novel's three chapters allotted to her demonstrate the dangers and anxieties of living in the social interstices. She is described as "an Italian-Somali, *iska-dhal*, born-together, born-mixed" (84), probably in her late twenties or early thirties. Domenica seems to suffer from an identity crisis because of the limited choices her mixed parentage seems to offer. In Italy, she is "welcomed with lively curiosity" by her classmates and is "soon relegated to the anonymous group of 'all the other children'" (209). Back in Somalia, she is considered 'different' and purposely excluded from those activities that would have made her belong. These episodes unnerve her, leaving her with a growing isolation and disappointment with everything in life. As a result, she begins to look at herself as a wanderer who, like Taageere, has no sense of direction. Domenica's complex identity evokes what Edward Said, in reference to the life of an exile, calls a "crippling sorrow of estrangement" ("Reflections" 173). She makes lacerations on her body in order to make sense of her fragmented self:

> Was it because I felt eccentric and undefined that I began to torture my skin? Did I perhaps believe that with the blade I could cut off the ambiguity of my essence?
> You, doctor, will help me understand.
> I can tell you that cutting became almost a morbid pleasure; I used to buy the blades at the supermarket, planning the time and place where I would use them. They were, for the most part, linear wounds, clean cuts from which I watched the blood flow, incisions that I reviewed meticulously until I drew a web of thin threads on my skin.
> Was it perhaps to make a statement that I cut myself with such rage? (212)

In "Carved Skin: Bearing Witness to Self-Harm" (2001), Jane Kilby describes the relationship between bodily self-harm and trauma when she says that "the act of self-harm renders skin a deeply eloquent form of testimony, where a plea is made for social recognition" (124). Riffing her ideas through Janice McLane, Kilby is of the view that "wounding one's own skin is another way of speaking of trauma and pain" (125); that self-

cutting is "a language that articulates past trauma by repeating it in the present of pain" (125). By cutting her skin, Domenica is performing an acting-out symptom of self-harm that allows her to question both the Italian and Somali societies for making her feel that she does not belong to either of them. The incisions on her body, then, represent the pain in her troubled psyche. Read symbolically, it could be argued that Ali Farah employs skin-cutting as a metaphor to interrogate notions of home and belonging for people like Domenica (and herself) who are born of mixed parentage. In a conversation at the 2008 Festival Azioni Inclementi, Ali Farah insists that Domenica's cuts on her body should not be seen as acts of mutilations, but an "act of writing on her body," "an element that allows for the creation of belonging, a belonging that the novel's characters experiment with in various forms" (qtd. in Lavagnino 72). The incongruent association between Domenica's deliberate self-harm and her sense of "feeling lost" (217) symbolises her plea for social recognition. The concept of *iska-dhal* (i.e. born of mixed parentage), then, could be read as pivotal in framing the question of identity and belonging in a relational mode rather than in terms of racial exclusivity for Domenica. Substituting Domenica's troubling identity with those displaced by the Somali diaspora's inability to feel welcomed, one could also read the *iska-dhal* as a trope that draws our attention to 'the other' in need of recognition and integration by host societies.

Indeed, Domenica is representative of the difficulty of fitting into the life of the host society undergone by Somali migrants. Ali Farah's narrative is particularly effective in its use of words and images that convey the wounds borne by Somalis as they escape their devastated country, and try to make sense of their interstitial selves in foreign lands. These wounds are both physical and emotional or psychological, and lead to the alienation and traumatisation of her characters in Europe and North America. I read the protagonist-narrators as people who, because they lead "a life of provisional living in a while-you-wait place of refuge" (Farah, *Yesterday* 103), feel disoriented and experience isolation and suspicion from the host society. This is true of Taageere who is portrayed as someone who is "always ready to leave," with his "things packed in a bag" (163). Elsewhere he speaks of his "pointless wanderings" (84) and his "sense of being uprooted" from his place of birth (170) and ending up in "a real foul-smelling hole full of men" with "a fire going and people passing around a container of alcohol, partly to keep warm, partly to forget" (58). This leaves him enraged, "disgusted with [him]self" (84) and "overwhelmed by … a deep and shabby sadness" (57) at being reduced to a wandering tramp: "And with this sadness, I went around the city, dirty and unkempt, speaking to no one, and I slept wherever I happened to be, just like a hobo" (57). Taageere

insists that because of his vagrancy and inability to take proper care of himself, he looked "so dirty and covered in hair that not even [his] mother would have recognized [him] if she'd seen [him]" (57). Domenica, for her part, refers to herself as "falling apart in Rome," being "disgusted with [her]self," and that "deep down [she] felt empty to the very core" (88) for "having lived through estrangements and readjustments that are typical of immigrants" (194).

As for Barni (the only character depicted as being employed in the novel), she gives us the impression that her situation is hardly different from that of her fellow immigrants. She is portrayed as someone who chooses to bury her head in her work as a way of coping with the frustrations of being an immigrant. As she says: "Intensity helps you think less [about your condition]" (16). Barni even interprets her job as reflecting someone "living in a constant state of emergency" (16) rather than as a calling to save lives. Barni may be referring to the demanding nature of her work here, but the effect of the expression "state of emergency" is not lost on the reader, as it symbolises and reinforces a critical situation in which all procedures are suspended until things return to normal. I construct Barni as embodying this notion in the novel: living in a situation of apprehensive, if not suspended, hope. Here, Edward Said is instructive, especially in his observation that "Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid or secure…. [It] is life led outside habitual order." More crucially, exile "is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal" ("Reflections" 186). Barni's own acknowledgement that her "home is always a port of call" (24) further signals the temporariness of exilic identities.

As suggested in the beginning of this section, the next cluster of ideas I would like to explore is the sea imagery in the novel. In "Being at Sea: Ontologising the Sea Narrative" (2012), Dawid de Villiers makes a vital point about the role of the sea in a narrative. In his view, the sea is "an occluded presence" (41) which is to say, that, the sea impedes or obstructs free movement of (human) bodies on it and its use as a narrative strategy in art forebodes an impending mishap. As de Villiers rightly observes, "a fundamental uneasiness remains" in all journeys at sea. He further suggests that "all sea-faring vessels are 'open,' implicitly, to the destructive power of the ocean;" hence "the boat [and its occupants are] in constant peril" of being destroyed at sea (43, 42). I recall de Villiers's views here to reinforce my argument that Ali Farah's novel fits into de Villiers' figuration of danger and uneasiness as the main characteristics of "seafaring accounts in which the ocean itself does irrupt into the text, in the form of a storm or a current or a calm" (41). This danger is reflected in Ali Farah's construction of Somali immigrants' experiences at sea. Somalis have been fleeing war and

instability in their country for decades now, often using unwonted ways to escape the violence in the wake of these instabilities. During one of these migratory movements, on 17 October 2003, an overcrowded boat with an unknown number of Somali immigrants capsized off the Italian island of Lampedusa. According to Lavagnino, this tragic event "was followed by a funeral attended by state and local officials at the Campidoglio in Rome on October 24, 2003," and that it "spark[ed] a newfound interest in Somalia" ("Women's" 63). This tragedy is only one of the many that have occurred in the Mediterranean, the most recent of which happened on 3 October 2013, when an overcrowded boat carrying Eritreans, Somalis and Ghanaians capsized within sight off the island of Lampedusa. The vessel is believed to have carried over 500 passengers, instead of the 35 it was certified to carry. Over 360 people are believed to have either died or gone missing (Ming par. 1).

The construction of Italy as a place of migration, and that Somalis drown in the Mediterranean Sea en route is prominent in Ali Farah's text, since we learn that "the boatloads of illegal immigrants did not stop coming, even after the solemn funeral" (16), and that the Lampedusa tragedy is only one of the many that have befallen Somalis ever since they started fleeing their homeland. Taageere even observes that Italy became an obvious destination for many Somalis "after the war broke out" because "it was there that we hoped we would get help" (189). He adds that "even before the war many girls had gone to Italy to be *boyeeso* [household help]" (189). Here, Taageere underscores the historical link between Italy and its former colony, Somalia. In a poignant description of the plight of Somalis as they escape their devastated country, Barni relates to a journalist who interviews her thus:

> Boats have been coming and loading illegal immigrants along Italian coastlines for a long time now. The tides go in and out and the beaches keep filling up with garbage: tomato cans, shards of green grass, small tubes of medicine, clumps of tar, and plastic bags, more and yet more plastic bags. And, carried by the sea, lifeless bodies, wearing tattered clothes, their purplish skin blotched with white salt. (13-14)

This passage carefully sketches bodies in pain. Through Barni's description, Somali migrants are resignified. Framed as 'the wretched of the earth,' it not only imagines fleeing Somalis as illegal aliens on the shores of Italy but also as chaff. An analysis of the passage also reveals how chaff operates in another way, through the sea's 'delivery' of "lifeless bodies" as part of the "garbage" that washes up on Italian beaches. This portrait simultaneously reduces migrants and/or refugees to mere debris. It also points to an understanding of garbage "as

subsuming themes of ruins, remains, discard, decay, hygiene, dirt, and disease" (Shanks et al 67). Many of the descriptions of fleeing Somalis carry resonances of this worthlessness in the novel. Domenica speaks, for example, of "jam-packed ships … showing [Somali refugees] on television" (216). Later, after she is forced by circumstances to flee Mogadishu, she speaks of feeling "*like a stupid package* that doesn't even get opened and is returned to the sender a little bit dirtier and somewhat crumpled" (215; my emphasis). The flight she takes back to Italy is also described as "jam-packed with all kinds of people" with "the pathetic flow of refugees" at the airport as they "poured onto the conveyor belt from which they apprehensively grabbed their luggage, … and then proceeded toward the exit" (215). Here, again, the fleeing refugees are portrayed as looking so haggard and haunted that, in Aristotle's description of tragedy, they arouse pity and fear in the reader. Anne Gagiano has also developed this idea, in relation to migrants in the novel being treated as worthless beings. Gagiano describes *Little Mother* as conveying "the horror of people reduced to mere rubbish." Somalis, in her view, are "not only dehumanized, but redefined as discardable, even as pollutants needing to be cleaned from society" (*Dealing* 298, note 26).

As all these intertextual allusions suggest, the atmosphere represented throughout the novel echoes the agonising and traumatised men we find in T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men or the damned souls we encounter in Dante's conceptualisation of "Purgatorio" in *The Divine Comedy*. The allusion to Somalis arriving on Italian coastlines as "garbage" and "lifeless bodies," for example, brings to mind Eliot's "stuffed men," whose "meaningless" and "dried voices" can barely find solace in the Dantean limbo-like realm of "death's other kingdom."[75] This is what prompts me to conclude that Ali Farah's text conveys the reduction in the status of Somali immigrants to the level of the debris of society. Through this, I argue, Ali Farah's novel testifies to the troubled and troubling complexity of migrant identities.

It is useful to further consider Barni's anecdotes about the images of drowning Somalis as they try to get away in light of Dominick LaCapra's notion of virtual traumatisation. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra explains that the most appropriate emotion a work of art addressing the question of trauma should arouse in readers is that of empathy, which he defines as "a form of virtual, not vicarious experience … in which emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other

[75] Line taken from T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men." https://www2.bc.edu/john-g-boylan/files/thehollowmen.pdf.

is not one's own" (*Writing* 40). LaCapra's notion has an ethical dimension which invites readers to "imaginatively put [themselves] in the victim's position while respecting the difference between self and other and recognizing that one cannot take the victim's place or speak in the victim's voice" (*History* 125; see also *Writing* 78). He equates this act to "empathic unsettlement." This description could be applied to the effects of the style and techniques used in *Little Mother* where the author presents Barni as not only empathising with her compatriots drowning at sea, but also being virtually traumatised by the horrific deaths. This makes the victims' suffering her suffering as well. In *Dealing with Evils: Essays on Writings from Africa* (2014), Gagiano proposes that because of the "misfortunes and experiences of disaster" in the wake of Barre's ousting from power, "Somalia is primarily [portrayed as] a haunting memory" in novels such as Ali Farah's *Little Mother* (279). Specifically focussing on Barni, Gagiano also notes that Barni is "haunted by images of poor Somali refugees drowning in shipwrecks as they try to escape from their devastated country" (298). For Gagiano, images of drowning refugees push the living into a state "of deep mourning, not of the dead (known or unknown), but for the entire rubbished society" (298; parentheses in original). While Gagiano's focus is on Barni, her conceptualising of mourning for the mass displacement of people is also suggestive of virtual traumatisation of Somalis who survived the Somali Civil War and the journeys to Europe.

The question of haunted memories arises again in Ali Farah's description of the Termini train station. After surviving the sea voyage and escaping the island of Lampedusa, the Somali refugees' next big stop appears to be the Roma Termini railway area in Rome. Barni even remarks that she doesn't "think one can write about the Somali community in Rome without starting from Roma Termini station, the crossroads, the scene of our longings" (25). It is at the Termini where immigrants living in Italy "go … to meet the world" (25). Here, Barni describes what the Termini means to those Somalis who have been away from home: it is a place where "the atmosphere vibrated in the expectation of news, everyone waiting, close to each other" (25). The expectation such migrants have of the place is that they will get to hear about news from home. Despite this sentimental attachment to the place, however, Barni also acknowledges that "Roma Termini train station is so full of pain" (26), thereby implying that sometimes migrants would go to the Termini and hear nothing from their loved ones, or even hear about the bad things that had happened to them. Elsewhere in the novel, she refers to it as "a place that exhales pestilence, a crossroads to be avoided" (145), "a seedy place … where you had to hold on tight to your purse and gold chain" (25). The fear and anxiety that

the Roma Termini instils in the migrants is significant: it figures as a haunted space, and those who arrive from far off lands seek ways of staying away from it. In this respect, the Roma Termini could be said to provide an interesting way of looking at how unsafe/haunting spaces could be a source of yet another form of migration for displaced bodies.

The question of how norms are established to define who counts as human and who is excluded from humanity has been most famously addressed by Judith Butler in two of her foundational texts, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). Butler locates *Precarious Life* in the radically changed cultural and political situation of post-9/11 America. She begins by challenging those who think that "any position that seeks to re-evaluate US foreign policy critically in light of September 11 and the ensuing war" should be construed as "anti-US, or, indeed, complicitous with the presumed enemy" (*Precarious* 15), or as "exonerat[ing] the individuals who commit [terrible] violence" to America (17). For her, such an engagement should be regarded as one of the ways that the US should adopt in order to "assume a different kind of responsibility for producing more egalitarian global conditions for equality, sovereignty, and the egalitarian redistribution of resources" (*Precarious* 14). In *Frames of War*, she spells out the far-reaching consequences of the West's construction of the other, noting that the differential distribution of precarity across populations is "at once a material and a perceptual issue": "those whose lives are not 'regarded' as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death" (*Frames* 25). Butler appears to deconstruct America's racialized view of others, adding that there is a way in which we all seem to be linked by a social vulnerability of our bodies: "despite our differences in location and history … all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody" (*Precarious* 20). In her view, as human beings we are implicated in each other's loss and vulnerability.

Butler's 'lessons' for an egocentric and apathetic America resonate with Pope Francis's views on humanity's indifference to the plight of others. In his homily at Mass celebrated with residents of the Sicilian island of Lampedusa and the immigrants who had sought refuge there on 8 July 2013, the Pope decried "the globalisation of indifference" coming from those who lead "the culture of well-being" in a world of suffering and loss:

> The culture of well-being, that makes us think of ourselves, that makes us insensitive to the cries of others, that makes us live in soap bubbles, that are beautiful but are nothing, are illusions of futility, of the transient, that brings indifference to others, that brings even the globalization of indifference. In this world of globalization, we have fallen into a globalization of indifference. We are accustomed to the suffering of others, it doesn't concern us, it's none of our business ("Pope on Lampedusa")

Butler and the Pope's approach to reconfiguring how humanity ought to regard the pain of others (in Susan Sontag's words) is useful here, and their suggestion that we must develop a new framework to address our different vulnerabilities and prevent ourselves from dehumanising each other reaffirms the dictum of empathy. In effect, both readings of America's and modern society's moral distance become important windows into Ali Farah's semiautobiographical novel as it, too, demonstrates that migrant suffering and loss is tacitly regulated by certain kinds of interpretive frameworks – frameworks that oftentimes border on indifference toward certain 'types' of bodies in pain. In this respect, *Little Mother* should be seen as an influential work in the canon of migration literature in its portrayal of migrant identities as not finding one locus as their last destination point. Indeed, except for Barni, the other two protagonist-narrators (and a host of other Somali migrants in the narrative world of the novel) are portrayed as drifters who move to different parts of Europe and North America. Therefore, according to this final reading, it might me argued that the type of migration Ali Farah advances in her novel does not seem to offer the illusion of a better life or enhanced social standing. In fact, it offers the opposite of the migrants' expectations, despite staying away from the violence in their natal home.

5.3. Anonymity and Dislocation: Mengestu's *All Our Names*

In an interview with Jane Paulick on 15 September 2014, Ethiopian American writer Dinaw Mengestu meditates on immigrants' experience of loss in the following terms:

> We often think that the immigrant story is unique to people who have left their homes. But for me it has increasingly become a story of people who have lost something essential to who they are and have to reinvent themselves and decide who they are in the wake of that loss. How do they find someone to love again? How do they find another home? How is this tied to the experience of violence? How does it reshape our sense of identity and how do we come to terms with it? – Paulick par. 3)

How do individuals who have "lost something essential," the family, country and friends they held dear in their lives *rebuild* and *reinvent* themselves in strange lands? In this section, I read Dinaw Mengestu's characteristic style of impersonation[76] to examine how the trope of namelessness plays on and inscribes migration and migrant identities. What connection can be drawn between names, namelessness and migration? Can names and naming be linked to place and belonging? Does change of name signify loss or gain? In essence, then, this section builds on the previous one in its attempt to examine how anonymity re-scripts violence, re-defines migrant identities and re-inscribes the otherwise dehumanised migrant lives.

Dinaw Mengestu was born in Ethiopia in 1978, but his family migrated to the United States when he was only two years old after the afore-discussed Derg revolution took over power. The new regime's leadership style led to scores of people leaving Ethiopia, including Mengestu's parents. Mengestu grew up in Peoria, Illinois, and has spent most of his life in the United States. He made his fictional debut with *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* in 2007. The book won the *Guardian* First Book Award that year, and in 2010 he was chosen as one of *The New Yorker*'s best writers in their '20 under 40' feature. *How to Read the Air* appeared in 2010, while *All Our Names* was published in 2014. In all his novels, Mengestu is preoccupied with a series of displacements experienced by African immigrants and refugees in the United States as they reconcile with being neither here nor there (Varvogli 119).[77]

Mengestu's *All Our Names* employs a split narrative technique in which two narrators – a black man simply known as "D__" (253)[78] and a white woman called Helen – drive the plot of the novel in alternating chapters. The chapters in which the unnamed black narrator is the protagonist are set in Africa, while those narrated by Helen are set in America. In terms of historical setting, the novel is set in the 1970s eastern Africa and the American Midwest spanning the revolutionary fervour (and the violence in its wake) that rocked Ethiopia and Uganda. The story begins in Ethiopia, on the cusp of a violent revolution there, where the

[76] I find impersonation as a characteristic style in Mengestu's fiction because of how his central characters travel from one place to another, using other people's documents in *How to Read the Air* and *All Our Names*.

[77] This statement is particularly in reference to Mengestu's first two novels. Yet, as I explain in this section, the strong sense of dislocation and displacement in the first two novels is also prominent in *All Our Names*.

[78] The closest we come to knowing the black narrator's full and real name is through what he tells an unnamed man who comes to take him away from danger. As he relates: "I told the man who escorted me to the village my real name, the one given to me at birth. Both he and his son laughed when they tried to pronounce it…. By the time we arrived at the clearing, my name had been transformed into Daniel – a Biblically familiar name among the devoutly Christian people who lived there" (213). Beyond this, we never learn what the actual name is.

unnamed black narrator is told by his father to leave the country after rumours of soldiers revolting in the south and of university students going into the countryside to persuade youths to join the revolutionary movement reach the countryside. En route to Uganda, the black narrator gives up all the thirteen names he was given at birth just as the bus crosses the border into Uganda (3) such that he is no one when he arrives in Kampala (179). In part, then, *All Our Names* is about a displaced Ethiopian who travels to Uganda, claiming to be in the country for "the second-most important conference" (143), having missed out on the first historic writers' conference that had taken place "a decade earlier" (4).[79] Nothing much is said about the writers' conference, or whether the narrator participates in it, apart from the fact that he later acknowledges coming for the writers' conference and being caught up in revolutionary violence (143).[5] Before long, the black narrator finds himself on the precincts of an unnamed university campus in Kampala, probably Makerere, where he attracts the attention of another poseur in Isaac Mabira. The latter is involved in revolutionary activities aimed at discrediting the government for not doing enough for the poor masses. The two of them form a formidable bond that enables them to pose as university students so that they can win more converts to join their cause.

Insurgency and its resultant force, migration, form a backdrop to the novel. Both Ethiopia and Uganda are on the verge of collapse because of the deteriorating political situation and standards of living. The novel's main focus, however, is on the political events in Uganda which finally force the black narrator out of Africa into the cold, unwelcoming hands of the racist American Midwest. A violent revolution is underway, led by a British-educated returnee only known as Joseph. Some of the protests take place close to university premises in Kampala, with the aim of making "the students … know what is happening" in the country (123). But Joseph and his army not only want to propagate disaffection. They also stage a coup with the aim of "end[ing] the nightmare [the] nation has become" (147). The revolutionaries live in the hope that "the government would fall, and [they] would rise" (166). But the coup is a foiled and failed one, as government authorities clamp down on the coup plotters. In the end, Joseph is shot dead by his own soldiers, after which Isaac hands "a

[79] Mengestu is most likely referring to the June 1962 African Writers of English Expression Conference, held at Makerere University, Kampala. In the protagonist-narrator's glowing description of this conference, "a decade earlier, there had been an important gathering of African writers and scholars at the university…. That conference gave shape to my adolescent ambitions, which until then consisted solely of leaving [Ethiopia]. I knew afterward where to go and what I wanted to be: a famous writer, surrounded by like-minded men in the heart of what had to be the continent's greatest city" (4).

Kenyan passport" with "no picture in it," "a plane ticket" and "a visa" to the black narrator (254). The narrator uses these documents to get out of Africa, adding that he "became Isaac as soon as [he] stepped on the plane" to America (175). *All Our Names* is thus shaped by two forms of migration: one cross-border, the other intercontinental. The two crossings destabilise the black narrator's identity and lead him to reinvent himself to suit his new life, as I explain in detail below.

Lurking in the novel's background is the trauma that drives the main character out of Africa, namely, the failed revolutions in Ethiopia and Uganda. Mengestu deliberately upends historical events to narrate the aftermath of the two revolutions, especially the incidents that happened in Uganda. For example, while both the fictional and historical Josephs' armies are based in the northern part of Uganda, the times the two leaders lead their revolutions are different. The fictional Joseph's revolution takes place in the 1970's, while the historical Joseph Kony's war against Museveni only started in the late '80s.[80] Mengestu is less concerned with historical accuracy however, choosing, instead, to put together scenes and events that approximate Uganda's fratricidal conflicts. This has prompted Aaron Bady to conclude that the novel is driven by ideology, and that "Mengestu is not worried about historical accuracy [in] that he tells a *very* ideological story about Uganda in the 1970's." Bady maintains that *All Our Names* is fashioned from a variety of different stories which lends the book "the privilege of feeling like history without the responsibilities of remaining true to it" ("World" par. 43).[81] Mengestu's novel is indeed hard to pin down in generic terms, for although it is clearly a work of fiction, it reads like autobiographical art with a few historical events appearing severally in the novel. Yet details about dates and locations that would bring us closer to what happened during those particular moments are left hazy. The question that may arise, therefore, is how this narrative technique relates to the book's subject matter, and it is this question that I address in subsequent paragraphs.

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[80] In "Not a Click Away: Joseph Kony in the Real World," Mengestu describes flying "with a group of journalists and United Nations officials to a remote village in Garamba National Park in eastern Congo … for a meeting with Joseph Kony and the leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)" in 2006 (par. 1). It is possible that Mengestu was influenced by his encounter with Kony, and that he draws on Kony's activities as material source for those sections that portray Joseph in his novel.

[81] It is an assertion that Mengestu himself agrees to in an interview, that he only used history as a means to an end and that he "didn't intend a real depiction of that historical moment, but [his] story is very much informed by it". (Nance, "Dinaw Mengestu" par. 9)

As a socio-historical novel that conflates the factual and the fictional into each other, *All Our Names* provides a realistic representation of the social and political realities of Ethiopian and Ugandan histories. The novel clearly underscores Said's observation of the experiences of exiles: that they are subjected to all manner of suspicion by the host societies, a thing that leads to a "crippling sorrow of estrangement," "sadness" and "terminal loss" in them (*Reflections* 173). In more ways than one, *All Our Names* reflects one of Africa's postcolonial realities: displacement and/or migration caused by violence. Crucially though, *All Our Names* reminds the reader that there is a persistent lack of belonging for dislocated subjects, and that émigrés possess a shifting sense of identity. Mengestu is aware of this sense of loss and rootlessness, for in a radio interview on PBS News Hour, he observes that the characters in the novel are "the sort of scattered wreck" (Brown "All Our Names" par. 27) that adapt to new environments by, among other things, "shifting their names, taking on new names" (par. 24) and being "forced to abandon the names that they were born with" (par. 24) because "with each new change, with each new upheaval, they are forced to reconsider exactly who they are. They are forced to reexamine their relationships as not just sort of solid, stable things, but as things that are very much fractured by the politics in which they live in" (par. 29, 30). Mengestu is particularly interested in how his characters refashion their lives in the aftermath of the conflict and politics that force them out of their natal homes.

This is an argument that he has returned to again and again in his creative writing and numerous discussions on migrant life. *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, his first novel, is described as "an immigrant novel" (Varvogli 119) as the author draws on immigrant experiences of Africans in the United States. Sepha Stephanos, the novel's main character, has fled his home country because of political persecution. The Ethiopia that Stephanos left behind is described in the novel as full of "hell every day with only glimpses of heaven in between" (*Beautiful* 100). The assumption that Stephanos makes here is that the US is better than Africa. Yet, as Varvogli observes, "the immigrant does not find paradise in America" (*Travel* 121) because of the racial issues that daily confront him. Thus it could be said that the novel explores themes of loss and the possibility of finding a home. *How to Read the Air*, his second novel, nods back to the themes of his previous book in that the two alternating stories weaved into the novel – that of Jonas Woldemariam as an alienated African living in the US and that of his Ethiopian parents' early years in the US – explore the challenges immigrants face as they attempt to integrate. These challenges, again, are laced with racial fault lines. For example, Jonas is constantly asked to explain himself where he *really* comes from even when

he tells his interlocutors that he is from Illinois (the assumption being that he can't *belong* to America, given his skin colour and his African name). His parents, too, are seen constantly taking road trips, which nods to their inability to settle in one place for so long because they don't really *belong* to that place. Thus through his protagonists, Mengestu highlights the difficulty of immigrant journeys and identities, and the sense of alienation and detachment they face in America.

In "The Rise of the Nameless Narrator," Sam Sacks argues that in recent times novelists have succumbed to an epidemic of namelessness by not naming their creations. What prompts Sacks to make such a statement is the ambivalent feeling that most people have about notions of home and belonging. This feeling is particularly prominent among migrant identities. Noting the relative lack of what he calls "the realness of [human] existence" (par. 10), Sacks suggests that the practice of namelessness among most writers is their way of trying to make sense of immigrant lives. As he suggests, "namelessness has become an increasingly familiar trait in the fiction of exile, in which immigrants acquire new titles to suit new lives" (par. 7). Sacks maintains that the stories mediated in this type of fiction are invariably about wandering "about statelessness as a state of being [where] because the narrator has no proper home, he can also have no proper name" (par. 6). Sacks' insights provide a useful entry in framing the connection between names or namelessness and migration and migrant identities, and in teasing out whether naming can be linked to place or belonging, or lack thereof. The implication here is that being uprooted from a place trumps all identities and notions of belonging. This loss is what makes migrants to rebuild and reinvent themselves and decide who they are in the wake of that loss. What makes such a reading possible in *All Our Names* is the text's doubling of the African narrator: as a character that replicates the identity of its author. This doubling opens the text to a kind of interpretation where both the author and the protagonist become known as immigrants struggling with notions of *home* and *belonging* as well as *inclusion* and *exclusion* in their host society. I thus suggest that Mengestu works to write the anxieties of dislocated subjects and uses his own experience (as an immigrant living in the West)[82] to do so, which gives his novel the weight of an immigrant narrative.

[82] In an interview on National Public Radio (NPR) Mengestu confirms coming from a family of immigrants, adding that "if you pay attention to the environments around you, you get a sense of who these [immigrants] are." (Kulman, "Dinaw Mengestu" par. 6)

As a narrative technique, namelessness provides an important filter through which to interpret migrant identities in the novel. In many ways, the characterisation of the African narrator as a nameless figure and his wanderings is Mengestu's way of making sense of immigrant experiences of loss and the 'new' forms of identity they tend to forge for themselves in the wake of that loss (as he tells Jane Paulick in the epigraph above). This is what leads me to argue that Mengestu not only makes a point about the troubling sense of identity for immigrant lives but also aligns his narrative with a tradition of books that concern themselves with the trope of namelessness. Indeed, the centrality of the sense of isolation and frustration of immigrant life is powerfully explored in the novel through this trope. The book's story is that of a young man whose real identity (understandably) plays no significant role in the sojourner conceit that the author sets out to construct, because of the prevailing sense of loss he experiences wherever he goes. Throughout *All Our Names*, the fluidity of the African narrator's identity is underscored by his continually changing names. As well as 'D,' he is Professor, Langston, Ali and Daniel to his Ugandan hosts and friends. Later, he is 'Isaac' to his American friends. This is besides the thirteen names his parents had given him as a child back in Ethiopia (which we never learn). As if this is not enough, his father used to call him a Bird when he was a child because the older man thought his son "lived high in the sky, far above everyone else" (179).

The bird imagery that the father uses is instrumental in creating the trope of not belonging in the novel. At one level, the image of the bird soaring into the skies represents the freedom the narrator longs for when he wants to leave his home village for a (seemingly) better life elsewhere. At another level, the bird motif is a foretelling of the wandering the narrator assumes, a foreshadowing of "statelessness as a state of being" (Sacks, "Rise" par. 6). In a few instances in the novel, the narrator acknowledges, and even enjoys, this attribute. The first instance is when an equally nameless man shows up to whisk him away to "someplace safe" (211) in a village to the west of Uganda because his bosom friend, Isaac Mabira, thinks he shouldn't be caught up in the revolutionary violence. In reference to the way his hosts' children sing his name, the narrator thinks that their voices "were a reminder of [his] place as a curious stranger – not totally welcome, but easily tolerated" (219). Elsewhere, he regards himself not just as an interloper but also as someone whose "life story consisted of standing on the sidelines" (139). In view of my reading of the African narrator as someone who has been forced by violent circumstances to leave his natal home, these words and expressions evoke the refugee claim process, wherein those who are on the move are often seen as

bystanders, unable to assert any form of identity or belonging to a place. That his passport originally had no picture in it and his visa does not allow him to stay in the US for more than a year is also symbolic. It extends the notion that, as a sojourner, he is neither expected to have any one identity nor stay in one place for too long. It is only fitting, then, that the bird nickname that his father had given him should be a symbol of a drifter who is able to stay on the move.

The narrative voice of the novel helps to create a cynical distance between the protagonists and those they come in contact with. For instance, the African narrator regards himself as enjoying "a privileged perch" with the people of western Uganda, just as he begins to understand why his father had called him Bird when he was a child (219). Given my interest in the workings of the novel as a text that advances namelessness as a new form of identity for migrants, the expression "privileged perch" becomes an interpretive device for understanding what Giles Foden describes as "the shifts and residues of lives in flux" ("All Our Names" par. 5). As such, I suggest a troubled, more disruptive, reading of the bird's-eye view metaphor in the novel as symbolising the spatial and temporal distance that is created between migrant lives and the host society, as if to tell us that their identity is (literarily and literally) tangential, like that of a bird that perches from one branch to the next in its continued search for a final landing. The implication here is that far from being an ordinary panoptic aerial view, the 'perch' brings with it the notion of temporary belonging to a place, which is what the life of the African protagonist is in the novel. The question remains: what does this temporal perch – read as Mengestu's construction of his lived experiences in America through the eyes of the black protagonist – tell us about the angst of migrant identities in the host community?

In its exploration of the conflicted identities of exilic and/or migrant lives, this chapter is further framed by a concern with the kind of 'reception' migrants get when they leave their natal homes. To this end, the rest of the section deals with what Mengestu has elsewhere called "the problem of race that continue[s] to persist and linger" in our societies (qtd. in Brown par. 19) as one of the ideological frameworks that re-inscribe the novel, and which forms part of the immigrant experience in America. After escaping from Africa 'Isaac' moves to Laurel, a quiet, semi-rural town in America's Midwest. Here, he meets and starts a romantic relationship with Helen, a white social worker assigned by the Lutheran Relief Services to help him acclimatise to his new life. Though there is no doubt that this is a story

of love at first sight, the social consequences of their relationship soon becomes apparent: Laurel may have "stopped segregating its public bathrooms, buses, schools, and restaurants" only a decade earlier, but it "still [doesn't] look too kindly upon seeing its races mix" (17). In this case, the novel could be said to demonstrate what Aliki Varvogli, in relation to Mengestu's earlier fiction, describes as "some of the ways in which the African other is excluded from dominant discourse and rendered invisible through the racially demarcated topography" (*Travel* 120) in America's Midwest. We get further confirmation of this from Helen, who speaks of the open hostility she and 'Isaac' meet when they go out for a meal at a local restaurant. She relates: "the entire diner fell silent as soon as we entered. All eyes turned towards us" (36). But this is only the beginning of the resistance from the restaurant's white patrons. When the two take their seats and place their orders, the waitress who is supposed to attend to them comes back, empty handed, and asks if they would like to have takeaways, a request that they politely decline (37). In a last-ditch effort to make them leave, they are served their meals differently. Helen's lunch is served "on the standard cream-colored plates used for everyone" in the restaurant, while 'Isaac's' is served "on a stack of thin paper plates" (39):

> The same waitress brought it, although this time she didn't look at either of us. Her embarrassment was evident. Isaac's omelette was on a stack of thin paper plates barely large enough to hold the food. A plastic fork and knife had been wrapped in a napkin and placed on top, a strangely delicate touch that she must have been responsible for. He unwrapped the knife and fork and placed the palm-sized napkin on his lap. (39)

Further evidence of racial stratification and systemic racism is reflected in yet another restaurant scene in the novel. After driving for some time, the two decide to branch off for lunch. But the reception they receive from the white patrons is chilly. As Helen relates:

> What we didn't have … were many places where Isaac and I could publicly rest without fear of who was watching us. When we stopped for lunch at a restaurant off the highway, it was impossible not to notice the hostile glares of many of the men dining there alone. They were deaf and blind to the world until we entered; once they saw us, all they could do was glare over their coffee cups and from under the brims of their hats. No one said anything to us…. We did our best not to be bothered. We didn't hold hands, we didn't touch, but we kept our eyes focused exclusively on each other as we ate our lunch and drank our coffee (224-25)

Elsewhere, Helen talks of feeling "exposed" each time she and 'Isaac' are in the midst of whites. She further observes: "I noticed that the man next to Isaac and the woman standing closest to me were staring at us, and of course they were not alone. I kept my head up without looking at anyone long enough to read their expressions. I knew what was there – anger, pity, contempt" (237). These incidents serve as reminders that the novel is not just about displacement and loss: it is also about inferiorisation of the migrant Other, and about the ways in which African émigrés become racially traumatised by their host societies. As already pointed out, this is mostly reflected in the American chapters narrated by Helen. In one of the perceptive analyses of the anxieties of race, 'Isaac' has this to say when he is told to 'behave' before whites throughout his stay in America:

> Later that evening, [Henry] gave me advice about how to live in America. He told me not to stare at white people, to say 'sir' if I was stopped by the police, and to live as quietly as possible.
> "'This is a hard part of the country to have come to,' he said. 'You might wish you hadn't.' (177)[83]

Henry's observations above reflect what Grace Musila calls "a Euro-American gaze deeply invested in the stereotypical fantasy of people of colour" (*Death* 120). Following her reading of Edward Said, AbdulRazak JanMahomed, Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, Musila argues that this long-drawn gaze "was conceptualized within a well-developed portrait of the Orient – and by extension, Africa – legitimized by an assumed knowledge that inscribed the West as the 'Seeing Eye'" (*A Death* 120). Musila further observes that

> This assumed knowledge, based on difference, resulted in highly polarized identities. Africa came to be defined as a negation of the West: it was everything Europe was not. Where Europe was mature, civilized and rational, Africa was seen as child-like, irrational and depraved. This definition by negation suggests a process of self-construction based on the definition of the 'Other' as different, which underscores Europe's assumed superiority as one that is concretized by the denigration of other races…. Underpinning this was the assumption that the Other – in this case the African – was incapable of returning the gaze (*A Death* 120)

[83] This recalls Iris Marion Young's typology of "faces of oppression" here: 'exploitation,' 'marginalization,' 'powerlessness,' 'cultural imperialism' and 'systemic violence' (Young 48-63). The fact that Henry is specific about how 'Isaac' must conduct himself before the white man shows that the 'advice' he is offering his guest is cultural and structural in orientation. In a way, then, racism is here presented as being systemic. It also reflects white hegemony.

Henry's choice of words thus provides an interesting grammar for the 'Euro-American gaze' of the Other that Musila talks about. The ideology behind the 'advice' is that as a black person, 'Isaac' must graciously and quietly oblige whenever he is subjected to any form of suspicion by white people. The use of the phrase "not to stare at white people" is a subtle reminder of the fact that as a black person he must not 'return the gaze' because blacks and whites do not share the same social standing. Thus though there is no doubt that the 'advice' is aimed at helping 'Isaac' adapt to his new environment, Henry's tips confirm the institutionalisation and normalisation of racism in aspects of American life. This is what Suzette Speight also means when she speaks of systemic racism as being endemic in America, and that "through its hegemony, the dominant group denigrates, ignores, discounts, misrepresents, or eradicates the target group's culture, language, and history" ("Internalized" 130). It is, perhaps, this 'fixed concept' of black people that 'Isaac' resists in the novel. His actions can thus be explained in words that are reminiscent of Mahatma Ghandi's nonviolent resistance. For example, when a waitress wants to know if they would like to take their food with them, he politely yet determinedly responds "No. We would rather eat here" (37). Later, when Helen begs him that they leave after she becomes increasingly aware of the glares they are receiving from the white patrons in the restaurant, he firmly tells her: "'I am not going to run…. I am going to eat my lunch' [here]" (38). What gives *All Our Names* more resonance, then, is 'Isaac's' and Helen's awareness of the fact that white Americans cannot tolerate the sight of them together, which is an implicit acknowledgement of "internalized racism."[84] As protagonist-narrators, 'Isaac' and Helen are thus central in the novel's complex engagement with issues of identity and race relations.

'Isaac' and Helen finally work out how to navigate America's racial templates. Crucially, one of the ways in which this manifests itself is through the bird metaphor. The novel's last American chapter takes the story back to the journey motif that starts the story of the novel.[85] But unlike in the first chapter where we see 'Isaac' leaving his natal home for Uganda, the penultimate chapter seems to suggest an inclination towards staying put. Helen addresses this

[84] David Williams and Ruth Williams-Morris define internalised racism as "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves" and that "it is premised on the assumption that in a colour-conscious racially stratified society, one response of populations defined as inferior would be to accept as true the dominant society's ideology of their inferiority" (255).

[85] This is a central conceit in Mengestu's fiction. In *How to Read the Air,* for example, the road trip undertaken by Jonas connects the reader back to the first chapter of the book, which begins with his parents setting out on a long journey from Peoria to Nashville.

through a question where she wants to know why immigrants and cross-racial couples should "leave America when there is so much to see here" (241). Helen's question spotlights the importance of claiming one's space and, in particular, learning to face one's demons, without walking away from them. The chapter ends with Helen and 'Isaac' "taking off …, finally becoming ungrounded" (244) supposedly from the racist slurs. Helen's description here would seem to suggest not walking away but being a step ahead of racist templates, literally 'above' and beyond its psychosocial effects.

A powerful image that Mengestu uses, especially in reference to 'Isaac' and Helen's resistance towards race politics in America, is that of a penguin. Penguins have been referenced in literature as symbols of someone who is indomitable, one who takes on the challenges of living in harsh conditions. Mengestu ends his novel with the penguin imagery. When 'Isaac' finally arrives in America's Midwest, he discovers that the society there still frowns on cross-racial couples. Mengestu's idea of putting 'Isaac' and Helen together so that the two of them can "make a penguin" (152) reinforces his interest in the idea of how people living on the margins of society strive to reinvent themselves so that they can survive conditions and environments that are largely hostile to them. The union between the two (the bird of the air and the penguin in the water) has implications for the definition of the new émigré, compelling us to shift from the drifter character we have all along associated 'Isaac' with to the more proactive and resistant penguin. Mengestu thereby places his narrative within a recognisable canon that gestures towards how anxieties of race can be overcome in societies that persistently refuse to integrate.

5.4. Local Fears, Local Migrations: Processing Trauma in Kyomuhendo's *Waiting*

The one dimension of migrant itineraries and traumas that needs further exploration in this chapter is that of authors narrating their lived experiences through their novels' protagonists. I briefly hinted on this in my discussion of *Little Mother* by suggesting that there are interesting parallels between Domenica and Ali Farah herself. In this section, I propose that Kyomuhendo's novel is a narrative therapy for victims of trauma. The hypothesis underlying recent research in this area is that trauma "comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation" (Whitehead 3). The victim may thus choose to narrate his/her experiences through the eyes of another person, out of the understanding that narrating the traumatising experience has a therapeutic effect on the victim. A number of writers have expressed opinions which support this line of argument.

James Pennebaker notes, for example, that "inhibition [of a traumatic experience] is potentially harmful" while "confession, whether by writing or talking, can neutralise many of the problems of inhibition" (2). Similar sentiments are echoed by Chris van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who note that "recovery from trauma begins with the finding of words and of a story about what happened; 'translating' trauma into the structure of a language and a narrative is a way of bringing order and coherence into the chaotic experience" (15).

In this sense, Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting* can be regarded as troubling convention. Its subtitle tells us that it is *A Novel of Uganda at War*. Yet, read through the lens of both 'the talking cure' and scriptotherapy as discussed here, Kyomuhendo does more than novelising trauma in her text. I thus suggest that Kyomuhendo is a primary trauma sufferer in the text who uses Alinda, the novel's homodiegetic narrator, to process her own traumatised life. Born in 1965, Kyomuhendo was in her early teens (which is similar to Alinda's age in the novel) when Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979. She was also raised in Hoima, the village that is the physical setting of the novel. I propose that the author constructs a narrative that defines lived experience by creating a female protagonist whose experiences embody the terror Kyomuhendo herself probably experienced. In psychoanalytic terms, Kyomuhendo could be said to be suffering the consequences of her lived experiences during the despotic days of Idi Amin in Uganda. She is trying to evade her trauma "by creating illusory versions of the events" (Rogers 11) she might have experienced, which, in turn, offers her "the opportunity of working-through [her] traumas by developing new interpretative strategies" (Rogers 11). This notion of the continuing effects of trauma in an individual is a reflection of a specific set of symptomatology known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Ultimately, the textual representations of trauma in the novel simulates the peeling off of repressed memories or the author's making sense of the traumatising experience. This leads me to argue that *Waiting* is a work of literature that is narrated from the standpoint of a traumatised author and her society. Her narrative is as much a chronicle of human suffering as it is, in my view, the author's plea for the contemporary Ugandan leadership's commitment to social justice. Thus the local fears and migrations discussed in the next section are inevitably yoked to the author's lived experiences.

Waiting primarily captures the traumatic aftermath of civil strife and violence for people "in a village in thrall to the arbitrary violence of a routed army" (Daymond 127-128). The village,

Hoima, is 225 kilometres north-west of Uganda's capital city, "and it lies directly in the path of the soldiers' disorderly flight northwards" (Daymond 115). The novel opens with the narrator's older brother, Tendo, keeping sentry from "high up on one of the inner branches of the big mango tree"[86] while the rest of the family members settle down to an evening meal. We learn that Tendo's watch is a "job he had to do every day" (6) and that he is not allowed to come down the mango tree lest he loses sight of the "pillaging men with guns who raid the villages at night" (Daymond 122). These men are "the remnants of Idi Amin's army: aggressively fearful soldiers who have been left to find their own way to places in the north where they will feel safe, and who plunder and murder as they move under cover of darkness" (Daymond 122). Historically, the novel is set in the last months of the 1979 civil war in Uganda when, according to the novel's proem, the Uganda National Liberation Army/Front and the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces "combine to oust Uganda's dictator-ruler, Idi Amin,[87] whose murderous regime has exterminated half a million people through state-sponsored violence."[88] The situation in Hoima is such that the villagers are filled with fear as they wait for the Liberators to 'liberate' them from lived brutality.

The novel's title seems to point to Samuel Beckett's absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, where we encounter Vladimir and Estragon waiting endlessly and in vain for the arrival of Godot. These nervy moments (both in Kyomuhendo's novel and Beckett's play) represent for us the psychic other of a disturbed person, which I read as another case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As I argue in the subsequent paragraphs, the villagers' hypervigilance reflects the Beckettian representation of existentialist concepts of despair, anxiety, isolation, uncertainty of time and futility of life. This nervousness is seen in *Waiting* when individuals constantly worry over their safely and whether they would "survive this war" or not (60). When young Jungu looks forward to going back to school after the war is over, for example, Nyinabarongo tells the young girl not to worry about going back to school in the midst of war: "I don't think you should be worrying about school right now.... *What we should be worried about is*

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[86] Goretti Kyomuhendo, *Waiting: A Novel of Uganda at War* (The Feminist Press, 2007), p. 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[87] Major General Idi Amin Dada was a military leader who overthrew the elected government of Milton Obote on 25 January 1971 and declared himself president. During the eight years he was in power, he became, according to Henry Kyemba, "Africa's most ruthless killer" as "a whole nation … spiralled down toward mere subsistence, its population cowed by thugs who were bribed with luxury goods and easy money to kill on Amin's orders" (*State* 12). He was overthrown by Tanzania and anti-Amin Ugandan forces on 11 April 1979.

[88] The exact number of people who perished during Amin's violent reign is unclear, with Richard Ssewakiryanga and Joel Isabirye claiming that "an estimated 300,000 Ugandans lost their lives" through "torture, summary executions and massacres" (56).

whether we are going to survive this war" (64-65; emphasis mine). Similar sentiments are echoed by Father, who observes that because of the war "none of us has the will to keep our yards clean when *we don't know if we will survive*" (66; emphasis mine).

Kyomuhendo uses her novel as a site to reconstruct Uganda's troubled past. To the extent this is true, Kyomuhendo would seem to substantiate what Eileen Julien proposes to be Fredric Jameson's sense of narrative as a "socially symbolic act" (667). What Jameson's perspective suggests for an understanding of the African novel is, in Julien's view, the simultaneous existence of a privileged artistic and literary form that "endow[s] events with meaning, in other words, to rewrite history" (667-68). In revising this history, Julien maintains, novelistic processes in Africa should still be seen as inherently "imaginative account[s] of historical or social reality" (668). In Julien's formulation, then, the (historical) novel does not suggest itself to a rendering of "historical accounts in the way historians understand them" (668). Rather, it (re)writes the past "through the lens of a projected future, so as to open up possibilities for it" (668). In this way, the African novel "is construed as a site of fulfillment, it is linked to human agency and self-fashioning" (668). This formulation certainly holds in the context of *Waiting*. The novel does not seem to suggest that it is a factual account of Amin's military dictatorship in Uganda. In fact, there are only tangential references to Amin the man in the novel, through the unregulated violence of his undisciplined army, which keeps the local population's emotions on edge. I borrow the idea of Amin's army as uncontrollable from the anonymous writer of "Uganda under Military Rule"[89] who speculates on the internal divisions among Amin's soldiers and further alleges that it was possible for the soldiers to commit any atrocity and get away with it because Amin failed to re-establish order and discipline within the rank and file of his army. According to the writer, during Amin's rule Uganda degenerated into a military state where the soldier ruled by his gun: "Soldiers [were] free to shoot people, and merely ha[d] to say that they were 'resisting investigation'" for them to be left alone (14). In Ugandan social imaginaries, Amin's soldiers are given such description (see Kyemba 45-9; Leopold 321-22; Mamdani, *Imperialism* 62). Kyomuhendo captures this general lawlessness of the soldiers in her novel. The book thus lives up to its title, as it is contoured with violence and tension from start to finish.

[89] The editors of *Africa Today* offer a tell-tale explanation behind the anonymity of the article's author: "The writer of this article, for reasons which become apparent in the text, cannot at present be identified, but has a long, intimate and continuing relationship with the Ugandan scene" (11). It is possible that the writer was someone close to Amin or politicians in the Uganda of the time depicted in Kyomuhendo's novel.

The terror that Amin's soldiers unleash recalls Mbembe's analysis of "the grotesque and the obscene" as the two essential characteristics that are used as means of "erecting, ratifying, or deconstructing particular regimes of violence and domination" in the postcolony (*Postcolony* 105). Mbembe (after Mikhail Bakhtin) maintains that this is possible because of the way state power and its agents inscribe and "invent entire constellations of ideas [and] adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts," including "the systematic application of pain" on civilian populations (*Postcolony* 103). As I have already alluded to, Mbembe's formulation certainly holds in the Ugandan context. If, as Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara suggest, Mbembe "speaks of the madness that power manufactures in the society, in a way privileging vulgarity and wrongdoing, making them seem normal ways of life in the postcolonial nations" (190), then Amin's soldiers are depicted in the novel as thriving on "the perpetuation of the bizarre [as] a means of affirming their 'power'" over civilian populations (190). As they retreat from the Liberators hunting them down, the soldiers loot shops, hospitals, banks, and private homes. When they reach the narrator's family compound, for example, they ask for "women, food, and money" (37) and shoot Grandma Kaaka to death when she tells them that she doesn't have any food to give them, and that they should be ashamed of themselves for molesting innocent civilians.

Because of this kind of 'banality of power,' the villagers in *Waiting* do everything possible to keep themselves away from the retreating troops, including leaving the comfort of their homes to sleep in the bushes at night. In the words of Alinda, sleeping out at night and coming back to the village at daybreak was a decision all families in Hoima took to keep themselves ahead of the marauding soldiers. Specifically talking about her family, she relates:

> Our sleeping place was a short distance from the house on the edge of the banana plantation where smaller trees had formed a dense forest. It was in the midst of this thicket that we had cleared the grass for laying out the mats we slept on. The banana trees shielded the thicket from view.
> The people we shared the hideout with had already arrived: Nyinabarongo, Uncle Kembo (Father's younger brother), the old man, and the Lendu woman … (5-6).

The forest used as the 'bedroom' underlines the fact that the villagers are ready to "map new paradigms to re/define their lives" (Ilieva and Odiemo-Munara 188), in accordance with the prevailing circumstances and conditions. Still, the question of whether or not they find real safety away from home cannot be easily answered – at least not when the reader learns that

while in the banana grove the grownups do night patrols first, before assuring everyone that the place is 'safe' for sleeping. The fact that one of the family members – Mother – is not always with the rest of the family members because she is heavy with child (which makes her movement to and from the secret hide-out difficult as she nears her last trimester), only increases their trauma. They are constantly worried for her and for themselves, which heightens their anxiety and makes sound sleeping impossible. Later, when Mother dies in labour without proper medical assistance (41-42), or when a character simply named Old Man loses his leg to a landmine, we cannot help but note the close-knit society's grief and uncertainty as it witnesses these sad events. This uncertainty endures to the end of the novel. When the Tanzanian forces finally pull out of the village, for example, the Lendu woman is depicted worrying over the safety of the villagers: "with these people gone, who knows how secure we'll be" (97). Later, she warns Alinda and Jungu to "lock the doors" for they "don't know what's going to happen with [their] protectors gone" (97). The reader is thus left in a state of anxiety as to what the future holds for the villagers in the novel.

While the community's movements suggest fear for their lives, it primarily functions as a commentary on the lack of confidence in both the leadership of the time and the Tanzania-led forces that finally 'liberate' them from Amin's rule.[90] It further reflects the instability of the country and, by extension, the whole of the Great Lakes region. A point is repeatedly made in the novel that the villagers' wait is a fruitless one, as they do not really know who to trust: "People had vacated the city in fear of both the advancing Liberators and the fleeing soldiers. No one knew what each group was likely to do to the civilians" (11). Understood this way, the idea of indeterminacy and uncertainty is enacted throughout the novel and becomes the defining feature that sustains the hypervigilance metaphor. In her portrayal of the narrator's family finding refuge every night in the open grove, Kyomuhendo suggests that violence shakes up local communities. More than being frantic acts of a family at its wits end, therefore, these nightly hideout scenes open up new debates and discourses on trauma and

[90] It is difficult to raise a strong argument that this is the main reason for the presence of Tanzanian forces in Uganda. Indeed, Ssewakiryanga and Isabirye have suggested that the initial reason why Tanzanian forces were in Uganda had little to do with 'liberating' Ugandans. In their view, it had to do more with reclaiming what belonged to them. On 30 October 1978, Amin had invaded the Kagera salient, a disputed region in north-western Tanzania which Amin claimed belonged to Uganda. This "prompted a Tanzanian invasion in 1979 that defeated Amin and put in power the Uganda National Liberation Front." ("From War" 56). This is what contributes to the villagers' sustained anxiety in the novel.

displacement; as well as on the resultant identities and social relations that are being assumed and negotiated during wartime.

One of the central characteristics of being exposed to ongoing or life-threatening danger is that it induces in the individual a sense of constriction, which, according to Judith Herman, occurs when a person goes into a state of surrender because he thinks he is completely powerless and, therefore, any form of resistance is futile (Herman 42). Various scholars recognise in this an adaptation to an unbearable situation. Henry Krystal suggests the term "robotization" or the numbing and blocking of affect, which, in his view, acts as an affective and cognitive filter that the traumatised person sometimes resorts to in order to ward off traumatic anxiety. (*Integration* 214). Although this process is subjectively experienced with relief, Jennifer Anne Tolleson warns that it may be immensely life-threatening insofar as the subject has effectively shut off his attempts to overcome, or somehow master, his traumatic ordeal ("Transformative" 47). Similarly, Kyomuhendo's *Waiting* symbolises an element of numbing response of surrender when, later in the novel, the villagers find it no longer necessary to run away to their protective hide-out at of the banana plantation on the edge of the village, choosing instead to face whatever calamity that is about to befall them. Thus when Amin's routing soldiers continue to terrorise the countryside, Mother gives up the idea of running away from them altogether, as she asks: 'For how long shall we keep on running away from them? (21). Later, when the soldiers shoot Kaaka and two other villagers in their disorderly flight northwards (59), the villagers decide not to go back and sleep in the bushes again (60). The villagers' decision is thus functionally analogous to what is known as acute trauma response to an unbearable situation.

Waiting also provides us with another highly pertinent example of traumatic affect that is gradual rather than sudden in its impact. As Ilieva and Odiemo-Munara's argument leads us to recognise, the text reflects "migrations of the displaced within" ("Negotiating" 183). Similar sentiments filter through Marie Kruger and Danson Kayhana's essays. Kruger notes, for example, that "the nightly migrations between homestead and hideout are part of a larger canvas of displacements" that occur in the novel (*Women's* 130), while Kayhana speaks of how Uganda's liberation wars have led to "internal displacement of people" ("Negotiating" 172). What these writers seem to say is that there is a "within-the-country exilic condition [that] points to the precarious nature of Ugandan citizenship, since every citizen is potentially an exile/refugee depending on the kind of discourse produced by new regimes" (Kayhana

172). In *Waiting* this is seen in the frequent scenes of the physical (and psychological) movements of the local inhabitants, in a bid to escape the actions of Amin's soldiers. This is exemplified in the novel where Father is depicted asking Jungu, Alinda's classmate and bosom friend, if it is possible for him to move his family to her village which, we learn, does not lie "close to the main road" (63). He worries: "Perhaps we should consider moving to your village…. I could build a small thatched hut, and we could stay there until this war is over. This village is becoming increasingly dangerous. And the Liberators are nowhere to be seen!" (63). Father's anxieties expressed to a girl his daughter's age reflect the impotence of the elders in the face of war and violence. Physical movement away from one's natal home is thus preferred as a better alternative to staying. In the end, physical movement becomes such a part of the villagers' everyday life that in Kyomuhendo's unusual treatment of trauma in *Waiting*, the memories can never be anything other than insistently present.

From my discussion so far, the anxieties of war and violence in north-west Uganda seem to emanate from two fronts, both of which are a threat to peace for the local inhabitants: the indeterminacy and uncertainty civilian populations have towards the Tanzania-led Liberators and Amin's routed army on the one hand and, on the other, the influx of foreigners from neighbouring countries, most of them also running away from violent conflicts. The tragedy of Uganda is that both these fears can be supported by the situation on the ground. Uganda is situated in central eastern Africa with Kenya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania as its neighbouring countries. Hence, it is in the centre of a region that has seen many internal and internationalised civil wars, destruction, and an influx of huge numbers of refugees over the last half century. A recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report estimates, for example, that more than half a million people fleeing violence and human rights abuses, mostly from South Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have now found protection and safety on Ugandan soil. Far from merely displaying the presence of immigrants from neighbouring countries, the UNHCR report must be read within the discourse of the interpenetrating contours of war and violence in the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa, and the traditional East Africa region due to its fluid, unresolved and contested borders. It is this porosity of the region's national borders coupled with the presence of failed states and ungovernable spaces – characteristic of most African countries – that, according to some commentators, positions Eastern Africa as one of the most unstable regions in the world. The argument behind this theory is that since the region is marked by poorly governed regions and borderlands with no proper mechanisms put

in place to monitor and evaluate what individuals or groups do, people are literally at liberty to do as they please, just as it is easy for unresolved grievances and animosities in one country to spill over to the neighbouring country. A notable motif of east African conflicts and violence, then, is the presence of large numbers of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Kyomuhendo may have drawn on humanitarian crisis reports such as the UNHCR's, to examine what Danson Kayhana describes as "the phenomenon of transnational crossings brought about by war" in her novel ("Negotiating" 163). In an essay that also reflects on the enduring presence of foreign nationals in Uganda, Kruger opines that "the presence of racial and ethnic strangers even in the domestic setting of a Northern Ugandan village testifies to a shifting political landscape, where new forms of privatized sovereignty and violence have remapped the geographies of power and space" (*Women's* 129). Kruger insists that the movements of people across the porous borders "illustrates the volatility of the Great Lakes region," and that "while Ugandan exiles and Tanzanian troops 'liberate' terrified civilians from state-sponsored aggression, Zairian refugees cross national borders in search of a refuge from Mobutu's[91] violent regime" (*Women's* 129). Kruger's observations are pertinent for they point to what Mbembe and Roitman, writing in a different context, evoke as "a society knocked about and mistreated by a succession of instabilities, shortages and blockages" ("Figures" 338). Within the context of Uganda's social and political crises (as highlighted in Chapter Three), the succession of instabilities referred to by Mbembe and Roitman is not hard to figure out.

In a Great Lakes region heavily mapped with intra- and interstate conflicts, which has led to a high incidence of internally displaced persons – including movement of people from one country to another – the character of the Lendu woman in *Waiting*, a refugee living in Northern Uganda after fleeing Mobutu's Zaïre, must be understood within the notion of transnational or interstate migration. As in Mengestu's *All Our Names*, the Lendu woman is a "generic signifier for a displaced ethnicity and foreign nationality whose presence disturbs through its unknowable qualities" (Kruger 138). Kruger's observation provides interesting insights into what she calls "the unsettling figure of displacement." She further notes:

[91] Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (also known as Joseph-Desiré Mobutu) was the military dictator and President of Zaïre who waged war (from 1978 onwards) against several rebel groups that were opposed to his rule. He was finally deposed in 1997 by forces led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila.

> Only identified in terms of a generic ethnic and gender identity, the Lendu woman remains nameless throughout the narrative and presents an unsettling figure of displacement on whom the hostility of the community will soon focus…. Her presence attests to the large-scale movements of refugees, the permeability of borders, and the intensity of conflict across the Great Lakes region. (*Women's* 130)

At play here are specific local apprehensions, expressed in the form of xenophobia and discriminatory practices towards 'foreigners.' The Lendu woman seems to be caught in this social angst in the novel. She is constantly vilified and treated with suspicion by the natives. For example, Kaaka, Mother and Father not only think of her as a rank outsider but also an evil woman. When Mother's baby boy develops *ebino* (or false teeth), for example, Father demonises her as the witch: "I am sure there was no *ebino* to begin with. The Lendu woman must have planted them in his mouth when she came to check him, so we could pay her money to extract them." As far as he is concerned, before she came to their village, "babies never used to suffer from *ebino*" (50). He uses this as an excuse to galvanise his fellows to send her away. "We should expel her!" (50) he decides. "She should go back to wherever she came from. We don't need foreigners here" (51). In bringing up the issue of local anxieties towards foreign nationals, I am here interested in the symbolic figuration of exilic identities. As Edward Said notes regarding the experiences of exiles and/or immigrants, they are oftentimes subjected to all manner of suspicion, which leads to a "crippling sorrow of estrangement," "sadness" and "terminal loss" in them ("Reflections" 173). Beyond the clichéd stereotyping of local communities as being hostile towards refugees, what is important for our discussion here is the way in which war and violence puts both the immigrant and the host society in a permanent state of anxiety and suspicion.

Kyomuhendo also appropriates the trope namelessness in her portrayal of the trauma of displaced identities in *Waiting*. Clearly, the narrative strategies she develops to tell her story are closely connected to themes of identity, rootlessness, estrangement and loss; equally, they are specific to the precarious situation internally displaced peoples find themselves in. An enduring motif that Kyomuhendo works with in her novel is that of depicting her characters as carrying generic names. We have, for example, names such as Father, Mother, the Old Man, Nyinabarongo (or mother of twins), Kaaka (or grandmother) and the Lendu woman. There are many reasons that explain why these characters bear the trope of namelessness. As in the previous two sections of this chapter, these characters experience physical and spatial

movement, since they are depicted as not knowing whether or not their homes are safe to live in, a situation that forces them into the unhealthy and inhospitable environments of the bushes at the edge of the village every evening. They are also constantly harassed by Amin's soldiers who raid and loot their homes, a thing that makes staying at home a difficult choice for them. Furthermore, they fail to identify with a home they can properly call their own and take proper refuge in. At one point in the novel, Father considers moving his entire family to a different village because his own natal home is no longer safe. This attests to a sense of rootlessness and disillusionment with the directionlessness of life that internally displaced people feel. As characters in the novel, therefore, Father, Mother, the Old Man, Nyinabarongo, Kaaka and the Lendu woman are descriptive labels associated with the Everyman character found in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Just like in this popularised Christian text, there is a way in which one can say that what the characters witness and experience within the narrative world of the novel reflects the everyman character who shelters in the anonymity of their identity because they do not know how safe their home is. I thus propose that the generic portrayal of the characters serves to foreground the contested, fluid and changing nature of displaced persons.

Ironically, precisely because of the narrative strategies employed in the novel, its ending harks back to the trope of rootlessness that is so much associated with bodies in flux. Kyomuhendo's development of the trope of a society living at the crossroads of existence persists throughout the novel. For example, the penultimate chapter depicts the coming of an earthquake followed by a heavy downpour. The just departed liberators' shelter is depicted as being "washed away by the rain," making Nyinabarongo "sound relieved": "now we have nothing left to remind us of that painful era" (107). Kyomuhendo's idea here is as much an effort to reaffirm the image of a new beginning after a terrible event. Yet, even when the novel ends with "people and calm […] return[ing] to the Centre, which had [previously] been deserted because of the presence of Amin's soldiers" (109), the notion of picking up the pieces decidedly assumes a dystopic quality. *Waiting* baffles the reader with its depiction of the last scene of the narrator's surviving family members "standing near the junction of the three roads. One led to Zaïre, via Lake Albert, the same road Amin's soldiers used as their exit route. The second led to the city, while the third led to the big plantation which used to be owned by Indians," as they wait for the bus that will take Father back to the city (110). The figure of the narrator's family standing at a road junction turns, for me, into a sign of a community that is at the crossroads of existence, of trauma as haunting. The figure of Amin's

soldiers retreating into Zaïre further evokes the unstable and transient nature of the peace created by the Liberators. Thus the novel anxiously debates whether the community's waiting is really over, and whether driving away one violent regime really signals return to peace and freedom.

5.5. Conclusion

The writers examined in this chapter weave narratives that represent feelings of foreignness and Otherness, in Homi Bhabha's interpretation of the term, experienced by migrant and/or displaced identities and their struggles to reinvent and reaffirm their fluid selves. Ali Farah's text is a work of the diasporic imagination that presents us with a scenario where a younger generation of Somalis remains ambivalent towards Somalia as a place it can call home and, instead, strives to create what Johanna Wagner believes to be "novel communities (through myth, trauma and motherhood) that transcend national models of affiliation for a more global approach to community" (3; parentheses in original). Mengestu has given readers a socio-historical novel which conflates the factual and the fictional into each other, and which depicts the social and political crises of Ethiopian and Ugandan histories which have driven many of its sons and daughters out of Africa. The novel ends with insights into 'the politics of race' for immigrants in the US where his African protagonist, 'Isaac,' is 'resisted' by the American Midwest white community. In the case of Kyomuhendo, the anxieties of both intra- and inter-state violence in Uganda are captured to show that even those who do not leave their home country start questioning themselves and their sense of belonging to a place called home. In doing all this, each of the writers has thrown light on the question of how literary texts imagine migrancy and displacement brought on by violent conflicts and civil wars.

Of particular relevance to all the texts is Mbembe's work on the theory of resistance and domination in the postcolony, especially his examination of contemporary forms of subjugation through which state power works, both among the dominant regimes and the dominated groups.[92] Mbembe's arguments productively engage with Foucault's analysis of the shifting dynamics of power where, "power must be analysed as something which circulates, or something which only functions in the form of a chain;" and where "power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" among both the dominating and the

[92] These ideas are spread across four of Mbembe's work: *On the Postcolony*, "Necropolitics," "Prosaics of Servitude and Authoritarian Civilities" and "Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis."

dominated (*Power* 98). In the three texts examined here we see various enactments of power and resistance to it, in the process of which individual characters negotiate their dislocated identities in the space of postcolonial chaos.[93] The three authors thus creatively engage the levels of ambivalence, of shifting identities and transnationalism, and of the violence, abjection and trauma that confront migrant subjects in Eastern African postcolonial contexts.

[93] I have borrowed this phrase from the title of Emilia Ilieva and Lennox Odiemo-Munara's article "Negotiating Dislocated Identities in the Space of Postcolonial Chaos: Goretti Kyomuhendo's *Waiting*."

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Circulating Fiction, Autobiography and Trauma

My study has interrogated representations of civil war in Eastern African fictional and autobiographical works. Specifically, it has examined the various and distinct ways in which Eastern African writers use art to translate and transmit the physical, emotional and psychological trauma resulting from intra-state conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The study found that literature provides an enabling forum for retrieving, relieving and re-evaluating violent contexts and their (dis)continuities in Eastern Africa. It thus proposes that the discussed texts, though not a comprehensive list of Eastern African trauma narratives of civil wars, be considered as a genre with elements that call for specific modes of reading and writing which I have highlighted in the four analytical chapters.

When I ventured into this research, I did so with three assumptions. First, that civil war violence is peculiar to the selected Eastern African contexts. Second, that any effort aimed at bringing perpetrators and victims together through a process that mimics the truth and reconciliation process was bound to fail, given the ethnic or racial tensions that lace most of these conflicts. Finally, I was under the illusion that life writing, its authors and the stories mediated in them were "truthful" accounts; that, compared to fiction, these autobiographical works would gain less charge pertaining to their reliability, commodification, voyeurism and sensationalism. I started revising some of these assumptions by the time I finished discussing Chapter One. I discovered, for example, that part of the reason why Rwanda's model of the truth and reconciliation project seems to be resisted stems from the fact that neither side feels satisfied with the way the process is being handled by the leadership. This led me to conclude that the annual commemoration campaigns in Rwanda are more of performances that are staged to advance a rhetoric of unity and reconciliation than acts that draw genuine remorse and sympathy from those who face each other, to try and resolve the burden of brutalities, resentment and guilt that stands between them. I thus suggested that this amounts to reconciliation without truth. The point Rwandans are making here is that there are fundamental issues that underlie the process of forgiveness, which seem to be overlooked in the process of reconciliation. In more ways than one, all the conflicts and the ensuing traumas I have examined in this study foreground feelings of dissatisfaction of one (ethnic) group

against another; about the severity of the crimes committed against certain groups and individuals which, in turn, either go unpunished or are selectively memorialised.

In view of my earlier assumptions about this study, I therefore ended up investigating the interpenetrating contours of war and violence in the region due to its fluid, unresolved and contested borders and ethnic identities; one that is also attentive to the complicated nature of the conflicts and the processes of reconciliation that might emanate from them. Traditionally, fiction relies on conflict to propel its plot forward. Like people in real life, fictional characters struggle with each other, sometimes succeeding in resolving their differences and sometimes failing. What is central to all works of fiction, then, is that there is a narrative perspective through which writers tell their story and, more importantly, their *perspective* on the issue/s they address. As I have demonstrated in this study, such perspectives manifest themselves in more ways than one in the authors' 'fidelity' to the narratives they advance. Literature's role in remaining 'fair' or 'balanced' in its representation of these conflicts also seems to be limited in this respect. Hence, implicated in this thesis is the (ethical) role of literature and art in circulating "the trauma story." As Kate Douglas aptly observes, "What are the difficulties and impediments affecting these circuits of knowledge (reliability, unspeakability, exploitation, commodification, voyeurism, sensationalism)? And what happens when we receive trauma testimony as readers and as scholars?" (272; parentheses in original).

Chapter Two, through its focus on the journey chronotope, was meant as an entry point into some of the ways in which notions of "predatory identities" play out in Eastern African contexts of violence. I argued that within the Rwandan context racism/ethnicity is the prism through which Hutus and Tutsis define and differentiate each other. My reading of *Smile through the Tears* and *A Long Way from Paradise* – while aimed at exposing prejudices of the Hutu against the Tutsi – helped to illustrate how literature and art can sometimes be used to advance a single story in a conflict, which is then appropriated by the leadership as the only story. I demonstrated how this works in Rwanda today, through the manner in which the national reconciliation project is conducted every April. This type of narrative has its own challenges, as shown in my reading of Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*. With its focus on post-1994 atrocities, I argued that Umutesi's text initiates a fresh revelation to the kinds of dialogue Rwandans ought to bring on the national reconciliation table.

In Chapter Three I worked with notions of liminality, the uncanny or unhomely and traumatic childhoods to suggest a way of looking at child soldier identities as traumatised, fluid, relational and always in flux. Keitetsi and Mehari's portrayal of ill-treatment from their parents and their subsequent presence on the war front places the reader's gaze on the problems of being raised in abusive childhood contexts. In the same way, Jal's focus on indoctrination affords him the opportunity to see through the ethnic and religious fault lines which, unfortunately, push him into the war front and make him participate in killings, looting and napalm. I also demonstrated how the three child soldiers occupy the inbetween spot associated with liminal identities. I argued that this is as a result of two things. First, that child soldiers return to societies that remain suspicious of them and what they might have done while at the battlefront. Second, that the (former) child soldiers themselves admit that they can no longer fit into the world of children (probably because of what they experienced). In other words, the feeling they have is that since they were at the war front and fought like soldiers (a designation associated with adulthood and maturity), society must no longer treat them like children. I suggested that this is what contributes to their unending, liminal state.

The study also found out that some of the narratives focus on women's experiences in violent conflicts. As demonstrated in the three texts I focus on in chapter Four, women's lives are reflected in different ways, containing nuances that expand our understanding of gendered experiences of trauma. In *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, the Colonel's daughter, Sara and Lily stand out as fearless female characters who are portrayed as actively participating in counter-revolutionary insurgencies against injustices done them and their communities. I suggested that by scripting the resilience of these women, Mohamed suggests that women should not be overlooked, let alone undermined, in nationalist processes. Similarly, Kawsar, Filsan and Deqo in *The Orchard of Lost Souls* redefine their roles in the Somali society and destabilise the roles previously associated with women, that they are only useful as sexual objects to men. In more ways than one, the three women are portrayed as fighters and forces to reckon with in a misogynistic society that has all but collapsed on itself because of the violent carnage. Suggested in *Tears of the Desert* is the notion that the body of a woman is used as a conduit for confirming and reinforcing masculinity in contexts of war. I argued that against all the threats made by the Janjaweed militia to Bashir, including gang raping her, she decides not to let go of her fighting spirit. She speaks out against the rapes in Darfur and, later, gives her memoir "to powerful governments to expose the terrible abuses in Darfur" (287).

Using Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity, Chapter Five, my last analytical chapter, focused on how the genre of Eastern African migration literature (un)writes nation and national identity for displaced bodies. I explored the various and nuanced ways in which those displaced by violent upheavals seem to "have no permanent abode but as they move to new places they take with them part of the old" identity (Simatei 186) and then use it to reinvent and reaffirm their fluid selves. I also explained how the generic portrayal of characters as a narrative strategy permits a novel understanding of migrant identities as hybrid or liminal identities. In *Little Mother*, Cristina Ali Farah offers a poignant portrayal of lives in flux. She portrays her characters as making great sacrifices and undertaking great risks to get away from Somalia, portrayed as full of fratricidal violence. Dinaw Mengestu and Goreti Kyomuhendo, on their part, adopt the trope of namelessness as a new form of identity for migrant lives. I argued that being uprooted trumps all identities and notions of belonging. This loss is what leads migrants to rebuild and reinvent their identities in their new environments.

While writing this thesis, Bhabha's notion of hybridity emerged as the prism through which I engaged with such related concepts as identity formation, agency, DissemiNation, ambivalence, liminality, displacement, migrancy, the uncanny, and the unhomely, among others. Although these forms of hybridity are implicated throughout the thesis, I do not explore them at length to a level where one would say their manifestations in the study are possible avenues for interrogating the physical, psychological and vicarious trauma resulting from intra-state conflicts in the selected Eastern African contexts. Further, in the course of writing my thesis, I discovered that the texts shared approximately similar thematic concerns and narratological devices. Part of the reason why my study proved challenging emanated from this realisation, that I was not looking at how a particular theme cuts across several texts, but how that narrative strand was mediated in an individual text. Therefore, it is possible for one to say that some sections of the study either sound repetitive or address similar issues. Thus I suggest that future research on the issues I interrogate in the study (and on the selected texts) should consider a stylistic analysis of the texts.

This study has advanced three key contributions to scholarly research with regard to reading and writing Eastern African fiction and autobiographies on civil war trauma. First, it sets fiction and life writing in conversation with each other in order to understand what it is that makes each successful in narrating the trauma story, and in explicating how the protagonists

(and their compatriots) re-invent, understand, re-imagine, archive, and record traumatic human experiences brought on by civil wars. Second, it has explored how literature mediates oppressive practices and relations in post-independence Eastern Africa. It has particularly traced how these conditions have inflected the genre of what I term trauma narratives. In doing so, it has outlined the contours of violence in the selected Eastern African (con)texts which, I have argued, allows the authors to "call larger publics to attention and enlist them in the project of redressing harm" (Smith and Watson, "Witness" 592) in the region. My sense is that by re-inscribing violence, the texts inaugurate what María Pía Lara declares to be "illocutionary forces in the public sphere […] by redrawing the understanding of conceptions of justice and the good life" for all (*Moral* 151). Finally, I have suggested that there is need for a deeper literary intervention; one that might resonate more broadly with an interdisciplinary ethical reading of the trauma story. For Kate Douglas, such a literary intervention must move towards "an ethics of scholarship" which, she surmises, should not only "re-engage literary and cultural questions about the relationship between literature and trauma, memoirs and industry mediation" but also "allow literature scholars to contextualize trauma texts as cultural and political texts without denying their status as literary texts" ("Ethical" 281). I suggest (following Mark Sanders) that such contextualisation calls for a different way of looking at literature, one that "asks us to think differently about truth; [in which] the desire for 'forensic truth' (the verifiable facts) must give way to an acceptance of 'narrative truth' (the personal and subjective truths of storytelling)" (qtd. in Douglas 282; parentheses in original). Within the context of this study, I have discussed and affirmed that the selected authors offer narrative truths about the issues they mediate in their texts. An analysis of literature texts, therefore, suggests that truth is local and particular.

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